



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

## For some places, it's all too much

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Harold Goodwin, managing director of the Responsible Tourism Partnership and the International Centre for Responsible Tourism. "And that's been going on across the world."

Some 1.2 billion tourists per year travel internationally, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, or UNWTO, a figure expected to rise to 1.8 billion by 2030. The surge is being driven in large part by cheaper airfares and massive growth in the number of Chinese from that country's emerging middle class who can afford to journey abroad. The number of Chinese tourists traveling internationally has tripled in the last decade, to an estimated 127 million this year, the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute reports.

"The first thing people want to do when they get money and leisure is travel. So this has been coming for a long time," Goodwin said.

Among the results: The popular Milford Track hiking trail in New Zealand, which draws people from around the world, now lets in only 90 of them



ENRIQUE CASTRO-MENDIVIL/REUTERS/FILE 2014

per day. Some American national parks, overwhelmed by visitors, are considering requiring limited, time-specific reservations. Peru has capped the number of tourists who can go inside the citadel of Machu Picchu.

Ever since its densely built, red-roofed Old Town starred as King's Landing in the HBO series "Game of

Thrones," Dubrovnik has been so buried in gawkers it's considering restricting the number of them allowed inside the walls of its medieval district. In trendy Iceland, where the number of annual tourists has quintupled since 2010 to 2.3 million, hotels fill to capacity, roads are clogged with tour buses, and there are fears about damage to

Bar Harbor, Maine, (left) and Peru's Machu Picchu (below) are two popular travel destinations dealing with overtourism.

the natural beauty that lures people in the first place.

Staggering under the weight of eight times that many visitors, Amsterdam — population 850,000 — has blocked new hotels in some neighborhoods and cut its tourism marketing budget. Venice has imposed fines on dawdling sightseers, and its residents in June voted almost unanimously to ban cruise ships from passing in front of the city's St. Mark's Square.

Cruise ships are a point of controversy in Bar Harbor, too. The Maine town is embroiled in a dispute over whether to allow more than the estimated 165 visits that disgorged 226,000 passengers this year into its little downtown and the already heavily congested Acadia National Park.

"I never want to tell someone you can't go somewhere, because travel and tourism is one of the most wonderful things in life," said Benjamin Altschuler, an assistant professor in the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Temple University. "But we have to come to grips with the fact that if we have too many people going to these places, it's going to destroy what makes them special."

Elsewhere overtourism has resulted in more drastic action than proposed constraints or debates at town council meetings.

Largely overshadowed by the Catalan independence movement, there's been a violent backlash in Barcelona against the 32 million visitors per year who inundate the famous La Ramblas and Barri Gotic. "Tourism kills neighborhoods," vandals scrawled in August on the windshield of a tour bus whose tires they slashed. Under pressure from angry local residents who in a government survey ranked overtourism as Barcelona's second-biggest problem — just after unemployment — the city has imposed a moratorium on new hotels.

"This is a wake-up call," said UNWTO secretary general Taleb Rifai, in a

speech to hospitality industry executives at the World Travel Market in London this month, about the growing hostility toward unrestrained tourism. The annual conference has already announced that the problem will be its main topic next year.

Travel operators are also beginning to respond to overtourism, taking customers to heavily visited places in the slower seasons and opening up new destinations with characteristics similar to those of the most congested ones.

"We definitely know there's an appetite for Americans to go to Europe," for example, said Leigh Barnes, regional director for Intrepid Travel. So the company now offers tours to decidedly uncrowded Moldova. "They still get a great experience with wine, still have that European feel. We really started to look at what was popular and what other places had similar attributes."

Barnes witnessed his own tourist deluge while in Havana quietly enjoying a rum and listening to music. "A cruise ship pulled up and it was like lemmings coming ashore. All of a sudden, it was packed. I thought, 'What just happened?' It makes you take stock."

Goodwin fears another outcome: that only the rich will get to see these precious places.

"Rather like big sporting events, if you're prepared to pay more you can always get a ticket," he said. "Of course, that's depressing. But the reality is that when goods get scarce, the price goes up."

Back on Nantucket, Fee is advocating improved public transit and bicycle and pedestrian paths that make it easier for visitors to leave their cars at home.

"It ends up being a philosophical argument," the longtime selectman said. "Some people are philosophically opposed to any restrictions of any type. But they have to accept that sometimes there are limitations. There are only so many miles of roads and so many parking spaces."

Tourists and locals alike share one thing, he said: "People love Nantucket. Let's be careful not to ruin it."

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## Michigan store is a yule jewel

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knoll not far away.

We join the throng of shoppers streaming into Bronner's supsize retail store, which covers an area larger than one and a half football fields. Inside, we are engulfed by dazzling floor-to-ceiling displays of twinkling Christmas lights, gaily festooned trees, winsome storybook characters and endless racks of rainbow-colored ornaments.

With 50,000 Christmas gifts and trims from 50 nations in stock, it's hard to know just where to start. Bronner's red-shirted and red-vested elves point the way to specialty collections showcasing 1,000 Hummel and 1,700 Precious Moments figurines and 500 styles of Nativities from around the world.

For many Michigan families, a trip to Bronner's has become the highlight of their annual holiday celebration. The store, open 361 days a year, also attracts busloads of out-of-state and international visitors. In recognition of this peripatetic clientele, Bronner's salesroom signs bid "welcome" and express a "thank you" to visitors in more than 60 languages, including Amharic, Urdu, Swedish, and Russian. Snippets of conversation in Spanish, Italian, Polish, and even Macedonian can be overheard in check-out lines.

We head for the Bronner's reception office to meet with one of the Bronner family members. It is slow going in a Saturday crowd that will top off at 25,000, and we need a GPS to keep us pointed in the right direction. In Section 10, we get bogged down in a jam-up of red shopping carts and RV-size baby strollers, but the snag gives us time to check out some of the store's 8,000 traditional and themed ornaments. There's something for everyone, from dog lovers, food junkies, and music aficionados to fishermen, ballerinas, and sports enthusiasts.

We pick out a red-and-white birdhouse ornament and a Santa dressed in a blue University of Michigan sweatshirt and maize trousers for friends in Ann Arbor. We also spot an orange-and-blue football-helmet ornament for our nephew who is a big Florida Gators fan. We toy with the idea of bringing home cellphone-shaped ornaments as gag gifts.



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



At reception, we are greeted by president and CEO Wayne Bronner, the son of the late Wally Bronner, a second-generation German stonemason who became a sign painter and commercial decorator before founding his store in 1945. Decked out in a red blazer and holiday tie imprinted with colored Christmas bulbs, Wayne, 65, tells us his 90-year-old mother, Irene, still answers the store phone on Monday and Friday nights. Five other family members also help run the company.

"It's a cheerful business, because everyone loves Christmas and is full of the Christmas spirit," says Wayne, who travels regularly to Europe and Asia with his wife, Lorene, and son, Dietrich, to buy new merchandise and work with artisans who create exclusive decorations for Bronner's. "We keep things fresh and change out one-third of our items every year."

Over the decades, Bronner's has attracted numerous celebrities, including performing artists, movie stars and high-ranking politicians. Singers Pat Boone, Marie Osmond, Anita Bryant, Andy Williams, the Lennon Sisters, Faith Hill, and Twila and Starla Paris,

**Clockwise (from right): A 17-foot-tall figure of Santa greets visitors to Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland, overseen by Wayne Bronner, who as president and CEO, oversees the store his father, Wally, founded in 1945.**

**If you go . . .** Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland, 25 Christmas Lane, Frankenmuth, Mich. 989-652-9931 or 800-ALL-YEAR. [www.bronners.com](http://www.bronners.com)

and actresses Polly Bergen and Cindy Williams all visited the store. Actor John Wayne once ordered a Santa suit from Bronner's by telephone.

Michigan governors John Engler, James Blanchard, and Jennifer Granholm often dropped by Bronner's with their families, and Laura Bush, a former first lady, reflects fondly on her



visit to the store during a presidential campaign swing through Michigan in her memoir, "Spoken from the Heart." Notable sports figures from the past, such as Detroit Tigers owner Tom Monaghan, race car driver Al Unser Jr., Gordie Howe, a.k.a. "Mr. Hockey," and Detroit Red Wings star Sergei Fedorov, also stopped in.

Much of the hard work that earned Bronner's a 1986 worldwide Golden Santa Claus Award, a 1976 designation as an "Embassy for Michigan Tourism" and other accolades is not visible to casual visitors, however.

Wayne offers to take us behind the scenes to see the inner workings of the organization and suggests we go the "back way" to avoid the crowds. Pushing through an unmarked door into the warehouse, he leads us through a maze of steel racks stacked with shipping boxes of merchandise — more than 100,000 cartons arrive annually. We peek into work areas where employees are inscribing personalized greetings on Christmas ornaments — completing 400,000 each year — and embroidering names on Christmas stockings. Workers whiz by us on elec-

tric carts, as Wayne points out the wall where he has mounted the bicycle Wally once used to navigate the quarter-mile-long corridor.

At the shipping area — where up to 6,000 packages containing Internet and catalog orders are sent out daily — we ascend a narrow staircase to the second floor. Stepping onto the catwalk high above the retail store, we squeeze between giant Christmas ornaments and snowmen with carrot noses to peer down at the brilliant kaleidoscope of color below.

Retracing our steps, we part ways with Wayne and then stop for pizza and chili at the Season's Eatings café. Afterward, we browse through the lighting section and select two strands of colored LED Christmas lights for our tree.

With our purchases in hand, we head for the exit, feeling relieved we can locate our car and that our home electric bill is nowhere near the \$1,250 a day that Bronner's pays to keep all those Christmas lights twinkling.

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