

# Cape Verde Tourism Online Reviews

Subjects: Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism

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Small Island Developing States (SIDS) depend on the tourism industry as an important source for their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Indeed, tourism is seen as a viable and sometimes the only means of economic growth, job creation, and earnings. Lack of studies was found both in SIDS, including Cape Verde, in regard to analyzing customers perception and satisfaction, and even more so when considering online reviews as a proxy of tourism experience.

Keywords: island tourism ; online reviews ; big data ; text mining ; Cape Verde ; Atlantic Islands

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## 1. Island Tourism

Islands are usually associated with unique, exclusive, and different experiences granted to tourists who visit these destinations <sup>[1]</sup>, thus emphasizing the importance of studying tourism in islands. These are usually characterized by: remoteness and insularity; susceptibility to natural disasters; institutional capacity constraints, resulting from the lack of human capital and the lack of economies of scale; limited economic diversification, which also involves a low degree of employment diversification; the small states economic pattern gives importance to the service sector, often tourism; openness which for small economies results in a high level of external dependency, socioeconomic and cultural vulnerability, and emigration; remittances remain a major ingredient of the small states growth model; income volatility and poverty <sup>[2][3]</sup>. Although there is no definite evidence of higher levels of poverty among small countries, their external dependency and vulnerability lend themselves to considerably uncertain income levels.

In the past, islands used to rely on agriculture, fishing and, eventually, handicraft as pillars of their economy <sup>[4]</sup>. The recognized limited economic diversification due to the poorness of resources turned attention to tourism as a solution to bring more diversification, employment, and better infrastructure <sup>[5]</sup>. Nevertheless, tourism activities have also brought negative impacts to islands, seen by their local communities <sup>[6]</sup>. Indeed, islands have also suffered from wearing out of their limited resources and fragile environment <sup>[7]</sup>. Furthermore, the use of sustainability criteria is not always integrated into the development options of interest groups <sup>[8]</sup>.

It should also be stated that islands normally feature a relative shortage in transportation, food, and lodging, making them more expensive than they would be if located on the mainland <sup>[9]</sup>. Since island destinations are also attractive to tourists based on weather, climate, nature, and scenery, they end up being challenged by a permanent tension between attractiveness and scarcity for each dimension experienced by tourists <sup>[10]</sup>.

Previous academic studies have researched tourism from several perspective layers: on the one hand, as individual islands, like Aruba <sup>[11]</sup>, Barbados <sup>[12]</sup>, Cyprus <sup>[13]</sup>, and Mauritius <sup>[14]</sup>, with most studied SIDS being Mauritius and Aruba; on the other hand, as archipelagos, such as the Azores <sup>[15]</sup>, Canary Islands <sup>[16]</sup>, and Madeira <sup>[17]</sup>; finally, as regions, like Asia/Pacific, the Caribbean, and Europe <sup>[18]</sup>.

Individual islands have been studied to address a number of relevant issues. Following the recognition of limited literature on productivity management in small island hotels, Kilic and Okumus <sup>[13]</sup> developed an empirical research study to identify influencing factors from the perspective of hotel managers in Cyprus. Other authors studied the impact of foreign direct investment (FDI) on the economic growth of islands, such as Mauritius <sup>[14]</sup>, comparing FDI with both domestic private and public investment.

Many SIDS have shifted their economies towards the tourism industry. Since the sustainability of tourism can be potentially affected by climate change, Cashman and Moore <sup>[12]</sup> examined this issue in Barbados. Indeed, this SIDS might be negatively affected by an increase in the consciousness of tourists from its long-haul source markets of their carbon footprint. Hotels on the island are also likely to have to put up with increasing operating and cooling costs as well as higher insurance premiums as a consequence of climate change impacts <sup>[19]</sup>.

There is a clear research gap in the literature for two main reasons: (1) despite their importance for SIDS development, there are only a few studies on non-Caribbean and Oceania small islands developing states; (2) in addition, there are no studies using User Generated Content (UGC) on SIDS.

## **2. Online Reviews**

Tourists' expectations of a destination are influenced by a number of information available, whether through pamphlets, tourism agencies, word of mouth, NTO online promotion information, and more recently through online reviews, the two latter being currently the most used. Online reviews are posted after the tourists experience the various elements available during their visit [20]. This mean can influence consumers' purchase intentions. Nowadays, there is an abundance of diversified unstructured data available on a number of social media sites that are growing exponentially in relevance and quantity every day. They are considered unstructured because they do not fit neatly into a database. These data are very valuable as a way to obtain market and customer intelligence. Therefore, business processes need to be fueled with this information as well as analyze it; otherwise, they will get rapidly obsolete and risk losing market share by not understanding, adapting, or predicting customer needs as well as their perceptions of the brand.

Consumers' intention of leaving a review was studied by Cheung and Lee [21], whereby among other motivations, they found enjoyment in helping other consumers. Fu et al. [22] found that positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) was more driven by attitude, whereas negative eWOM was more driven by subjective norms. In restaurant experience, Jeong et al. [23] found that positive reviews were triggered by satisfaction experience with food, staff, appearance, and ambience, while the price was not a key driver for positive reviews. Text mining extracts and analyzes the useful information and knowledge that is hidden in text content. Furthermore, government strategies for tourism may consider an analysis of online reviews [24] whereby NTOs can use the proposed data analytics approach to understand what drives tourists' satisfaction, assisting in shaping a country's strategy.

## **3. Small Island Developing States**

Jafari [25] stated that at that time, almost every nation in the world realized the potential and importance of tourism as an economic and prosperous industry. Although there is a number of well established, fully functioning and popular tourist islands in the world, such as Honolulu, Santorini, Crete, Cyprus, Capri, Bora Bora, Bali, Phuket, Cozumel, Oahu, and Kauai, there is also a number of small islands that are still going through development. SIDS were first recognized as a distinct group of developing countries at the UNCED [26]. A list of SIDS divided by geographic regions appears on the UNCTAD website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sids/list> (accessed on 30 June 2021).

Although islands suffer from general scarcity and the idea of being out of reach, difficult access makes it an attractive and almost exclusive destination. As so, islands are becoming an even more attractive destination. The number of international tourists visiting SIDS has increased by almost 300% in the decade up to 2011, from over 12 million to 41 million [27]. The UNWTO, in its 2012 World Report (Rio +20) as well as later [28], explained that international tourism is an essential economic source that promotes growth, foreign exchange, income redistribution, poverty alleviation, and job opportunities in SIDS.

As they are becoming more known around the globe, SIDS' strategic development needs to ensure their sustainable growth. UNWTO [27] argued that tourism development planned and managed in a sustainable way would bring huge economic benefits as well as development to small islands. This report also stated that tourism had already helped Cape Verde and the Maldives to move up position from their previous category of the least developed countries. They have a number of challenges to deal with, whether environmental and climate change, water shortage, natural disasters, external economic shocks, or dependency on imports. To support their development, international summits and conferences were established. Furthermore, according to UNWTO [28], the Barbados Program of Action was developed to assist SIDS in their sustainable development efforts. Also, an action platform was developed to help and monitor the implementation of pledges and commitments of partnerships.

The 2030 United Nations agenda is a balanced economic, social, and environmental plan of action for sustainable development where a worldwide collaborative partnership was established. Among other things, the plan seeks to eradicate poverty as the basis for sustainable development. All countries and stakeholders will make part of it in a collaborative partnership. They will give special attention to SIDS in pursuing sustainable development (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed on 30 June 2021)).

## 4. Cape Verde

Cape Verde was classified as a SIDS back in 1992 <sup>[26]</sup>. Historically speaking, Cape Verde was discovered and colonized by Portuguese explorers who, in the 15th century, established the first European settlement in the tropics. Only in 1975, Cape Verde achieved its independence from Portugal. This archipelago with ten islands of volcanic origin is located in West Africa. It is part of the Macaronesia eco-region in the central Atlantic Ocean along with the Portuguese Madeira and the Spanish Canary Islands. As of 2018, the total population of Cape Verde was just over half a million (circa 553 thousand), with nearly 64% of the inhabitants living in urban areas. The total land area of this country is 4033 km<sup>2</sup>, with a density of 136 people per km<sup>2</sup> ([www.worldpopulationreview.com](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com) (accessed on 30 June 2021)). Due to the lack of natural resources, its developing economy is mostly service-oriented. However, there has been a growing focus on tourism and on foreign investment <sup>[28]</sup>.

In this considered SIDS (UN, 2016), there are four islands (Brava, Fogo, Santo Antão, and São Nicolau) being promoted by its national tourism organization (NTO) as Islands of the Senses; three (Boa Vista, Maio, and Sal) are promoted as Islands of the Sun, and two (Santiago and São Vicente) are communicated as Islands of the Essence; one (Santa Luzia) is an unoccupied island ([www.guidadecaboverde.cv](http://www.guidadecaboverde.cv) (accessed 15 July 2020)). According to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística <sup>[29]</sup>, the most visited islands are by far the Islands of the Sun—Sal (372k) and Boa Vista (241k)—followed by the Islands of the Essence—Santiago (95k) and São Vicente (48k)—and then the Islands of the Senses. The main tourists generating markets are the UK (196k), Germany (92k), France (85k), Portugal (80k), and Benelux (80k).

This paper reports on the two most visited Islands of the Sun, Boa Vista and Sal. In terms of arrivals, these two islands account for three quarters (74.9%) of all tourists coming to the country (Sal: 45.5%; Boa Vista: 29.4%). Regarding nights, the figures are even more impressive, totaling 89.9% (Sal: 51.9%; Boa Vista: 38.0%). Understandably, the supply numbers also show a strong predominance of these two islands, with Sal (47.4%) and Boa Vista (26.7%) taking 74.1% of the overall lodging capacity in Cape Verde. Finally, these two islands alone employ 77.6% of the workforce in tourism (Sal: 52.9%; Boa Vista: 24.7%) of the whole nine islands of the country <sup>[29]</sup>.

Those islands of the sun are located closest to Africa and the Sahara desert, with more sand, better suited to beach tourism. They are communicated as offering beaches of white sand to lose sight on the horizon, some deserted virgins in a pure state. Waters are tepid and translucent, sometimes a turquoise blue to remind tourists of true gemstones. Visitors are able to dive with fish and let the body go to the waves while the sun shines high, practically 365 days a year. They provide activities aimed at travelers who do not dispense unique moments by the sea or long walks by the sand while picking up shells. Tourists may surf waves, paddle, or venture into windsurfing or kitesurfing. These islands are targeted to those in love with the sun and the sea.

Cape Verde is present on online social media platforms, such as TripAdvisor. Nowadays, it is vital for a national tourist office to keep updated useful tourism information as well as to be able to make more assertive tourism destination online promotions. There are several international chains (e.g., Iberostar, Riu, Decameron) operating in both Sal and Boa Vista islands. The information generated from data analysis of extracted textual online reviews shared by visitors of island tourist destinations is a must for foundational decision making by destination marketing organizations as well as businesses. Hence, this rationale justifies the current study and its addressable identified research gap found in the scientific literature.

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