



Big Five Tours & Expeditions Study Makes the Case for Community Employment as Tourism’s Primary Economic Driver

New multi-destination analysis argues that job creation, not visitor arrivals, should be the true measure of tourism’s economic impact, and finds community-based jobs still account for only about 20% of employment

June 24, 2026, Stuart, FL – Big Five Tours & Expeditions (Big Five) today released a multi-year study built around a pointed conclusion: tourism’s economic impact should be measured by the jobs it creates, especially in the communities that host travelers, not by visitor arrivals. Titled: ***Employment Impact of Sustainable Tourism in Key Destinations***, the report finds that a single booking generates an average of 35 jobs over a 10-day journey, yet only about 20% reach local communities. Big Five built the study to increase that number and to put job creation per booking at the forefront of how the industry, and the governments that depend on it, measure success.

“Too many destinations measure success by tourist arrivals, while the people who host those travelers see the smallest share of the jobs,” said Ashish Sanghrajka, President of Big Five.

“Community-based employment is still far too light roughly one-fifth of the total in most places, and well below that in many. That is exactly backwards, and it is precisely why we built this report.”

The case for changing what gets measured was made vivid by the pandemic. The World Travel & Tourism Council has long held that roughly one in ten jobs worldwide is tied to travel and tourism a figure once dismissed as inflated, until COVID-19 erased nearly 62 million tourism jobs in 2020, with Africa hardest hit, losing 29.3% of its sector workforce.

Yet the metrics governments tracked hid the damage: between March and June 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean shed an estimated 47 million jobs while open unemployment barely moved, from 8.9% to 11.0%, and South Africa’s official jobless rate actually fell even as employment dropped by 2.2 million in a single quarter. The wrong things were being counted.

“One crucial truth emerged during the pandemic: tourism’s actual impact on job creation had never been accurately assessed,” Sanghrajka said. *“Monitoring three economies between March and June 2020, where unemployment surged from 12% to over 60%, flipped my view the one-in-ten ratio isn’t inflated; if anything, it is conservative. When leaders can’t see tourism’s true contribution, the most vulnerable workers’ pay the price.*

To measure what had gone unmeasured, Big Five developed a method first piloted in Peru and now applied across its destinations with annual reassessment that tracks job generation across accommodation, transportation, restaurants, land management, and local communities.

The finding is consistent: Community-Based positions averages only about 20% of jobs created. For a sector wholly dependent on the places and people it visits, Big Five argues this share is the single greatest opportunity to make tourism a genuine engine of local prosperity.

The data also shows what is possible when itineraries are built around community rather than volume. Colombia led as the study's "Community Champion," with 38.8% of its 47.4 jobs per booking reaching local communities nearly double the global average followed by Sri Lanka (31.3%), Tanzania (27.4%), and the Southern Africa circuit of South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe (24.3%).

Big Five argues the lever for change sits closer to the traveler than most realize: every itinerary an advisor designs and every trip a client books decides where tourism's value lands but only if they can see it. To that end, Big Five is going to include a destination jobs report on every guest's final itinerary, paired with its latest [2025 Impact Report](#), so each traveler sees the employment their journey generates and the share reaching local communities. The framing is deliberate: rather than telling guests how they *could* make a difference, Big Five shows them how they *already are*.

"We advocate for tourist boards, operators, and accommodations to treat community-sourced jobs as a significant KPI," Sanghrajka said. *"As travelers and industry stakeholders, we hold the power to shape the narrative and by focusing on the right indicators, to advocate for policies that reflect the entire economic spectrum, not just its surface."*

The complete study, with Destination-by-Destination breakdowns, is available through Big Five Tours & Expeditions. For more information, visit bigfive.com.

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About Big Five Tours & Expeditions

Founded in Kenya in 1973 by the late Mahen Sanghrajka, Big Five Tours & Expeditions is renowned for customized, luxury adventure travel to destinations across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the South Pacific. A Certified B Corporation, Big Five, has been recognized by the travel industry for its sustainable tourism commitment and holds regional member designation with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), allowing the brand to further expand its impact on a global scale by supporting SMEs around the world. For more information about Big Five's customized journeys, visit bigfive.com.