



Level 7 The Culture and Society in Tourism

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Self-check questions with model answers (self-assessment)

Tick-box self-checklist

Using your Study Guide

Welcome to the study guide for, designed to support those completing their **Level 7 Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality Management**.

This study guide follows the order of the syllabus, which is the basis for your studies. Each chapter starts by listing the syllabus learning outcomes covered and the assessment criteria.

Level 7 Units

Unit Reference	Mandatory Units	Level	TQT	Credit	GLH
HTM701	Marketing Approaches in Hospitality and Tourism	7	300	30	150
HTM702	Strategic Planning Facets in Hospitality and Tourism	7	300	30	150
HTM703	Tourism Policy in International Context and Development	7	300	30	150
HTM704	The Culture and Society in Tourism	7	300	30	150

The study guide includes a number of features to enhance your studies:



'Over to you': activities for you to apply what you have learned) in the space provided).



Industry Insights: discover up-to-date trends, expert opinions, and examples from leading organisations in the travel and tourism industry to help you understand how theory applies in real-world practice.



Did you know? highlights interesting facts or surprising information to help you deepen your understanding of travel and tourism topics.



Case studies: realistic business scenarios to reinforce and test your understanding of what you have read.



'Revision on the go': use your phone camera to capture these key pieces of learning, then save them on your phone to use as revision notes.



'Need to know': key pieces of information that are highlighted in the text.



Self-check exercises: Each task (one per learning outcome) requires you to source, read, and critically engage with a peer-reviewed journal article.

Tables, graphs and charts: to bring data to life.

Reading list: identifying resources for further study.

Source/quotation information to cast further light on the subject from industry sources.

Highlighted words throughout denoting **glossary terms** located at the end of the study guide.

Note

Website addresses current as of March 2026.

Level 7 The Culture and Society in Tourism

About this unit

This unit assists you in being able to provide a discussion on the local and international issues of tourism.

You will also be able to understand the effectivity of tourism and travel in the context of society and your personal views. It also provides a deeper understanding of the role and functions of tourism.

The Culture and Society in Tourism unit covers information on the contemporary tourism management and development.

You will be able to review how the roles of tourism represent public culture, the public heritage and the public nature of places which has possibly changed under the new climates of postmodern, post-industrial and post-colonial concepts.

Chapter One – Identify and analyse the current trends in tourism

Introduction

This chapter looks at the current trends in tourism.

You will identify the current trends available in tourism.

Next, you will analyse the current trends identified in context of tourism and an organisation in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Learning Outcomes

On completing the chapter, you will be able to:

1. Identify and analyse the current trends in tourism

Assessment Criteria

1.1 Identify the current trends available in tourism.

1.2 Analyse the current trends identified in context of tourism and an organisation in the hospitality and tourism sector.

1.1 Identify the current trends available in tourism

Introduction

Tourism is among the most culturally responsive and socially dynamic industries in the global economy. The ways in which people travel, the experiences they seek, the values they express through their travel choices, and the cultural and societal forces that shape those choices are in continuous evolution. Identifying current trends in tourism is not merely a matter of cataloguing what is popular; at the MBA level it requires understanding the deeper cultural, demographic, technological, environmental, and societal shifts that drive behavioural change, and assessing what these trends mean for destinations, hospitality organisations, and the communities that host tourism.

This section examines the most significant contemporary trends in tourism through the lens of culture and society, organised into five interconnected thematic areas: shifting traveller values and motivations, demographic and generational change, technology-mediated travel culture, the evolving relationship between tourism and place, and the emergence of new tourism typologies driven by cultural and social forces. Each trend is analysed not merely as a market development but as a reflection of broader cultural and societal transformation.

1. Shifting Traveller Values and Motivations

The quest for authenticity and meaning. Contemporary travellers, particularly in mature tourism markets, are increasingly motivated by the desire for authentic, meaningful experiences that connect them with the genuine character of a place and its people, rather than sanitised, staged, or commodified encounters designed for tourist consumption. This trend reflects a broader cultural shift – documented by sociologists and consumer behaviour researchers – away from material consumption as a primary source of identity and status toward experiential consumption, personal growth, and the search for meaning. In tourism, this manifests as growing demand for immersive cultural experiences (cooking with local families, participating in community festivals, learning traditional crafts), for accommodation that reflects local character rather than international standardisation (boutique hotels, heritage properties, design-led locally rooted brands), for food and drink experiences rooted in terroir and culinary tradition, and for encounters that facilitate genuine human connection rather than transactional service. The philosophical roots of this trend can be traced to what the sociologist Dean MacCannell described as the tourist's search for authenticity – a search that is paradoxically intensified by the awareness that much of what tourism offers is staged or performed for commercial purposes.

Conscious and responsible travel. A growing segment of travellers is making travel decisions that reflect environmental, social, and ethical considerations alongside personal preference and value for money. This trend encompasses the desire to reduce the carbon footprint of travel (through flight reduction, carbon offsetting, or modal shift to rail), to support locally owned rather than multinational tourism businesses, to engage in voluntourism or conservation activities, to choose accommodation with credible sustainability credentials, to avoid destinations suffering from overtourism, and to respect the cultural norms and environmental sensitivities of host communities. The conscious travel trend is driven by broader societal forces including climate activism, ethical consumerism, social media accountability (where irresponsible tourist behaviour is publicly shamed), and generational value shifts among younger travellers for whom sustainability is not a niche concern but a baseline expectation. However, the trend must be

critically assessed: research consistently shows a significant gap between stated intentions and actual behaviour – travellers who express strong sustainability values in surveys frequently choose the cheapest flight and the most conveniently located hotel regardless of their environmental credentials.

Wellness and self-care as travel motivation. The global wellness economy, valued at over \$5.6 trillion, has profoundly influenced tourism demand. Wellness tourism has evolved from a niche spa-and-retreat market into a mainstream motivational category that shapes destination choice, accommodation selection, activity programming, and food and beverage expectations across the entire travel spectrum. Contemporary wellness tourism encompasses physical health (spa treatments, thermal bathing, medical tourism, fitness retreats), mental health (mindfulness retreats, digital detox programmes, nature therapy, creative workshops), nutritional wellness (plant-based cuisine, clean eating, functional food experiences), spiritual wellness (yoga retreats, pilgrimage, meditation centres), and sleep wellness (sleep tourism programmes, circadian-optimised hotel rooms, nature-sound environments). The trend reflects a cultural shift in which self-care has become a socially validated priority, and travel is conceived not as an escape from daily life but as an investment in personal wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend by heightening awareness of health, the psychological toll of stress and isolation, and the therapeutic value of nature, movement, and human connection.

The experience economy and transformation. Pine and Gilmore's concept of the experience economy – in which consumers pay for memorable experiences rather than mere goods and services – has become a defining framework for understanding contemporary tourism demand. The most advanced expression of this trend is transformative travel: the expectation that travel should not merely entertain or relax but should change the traveller in some meaningful way – expanding their understanding, challenging their assumptions, developing new skills, or shifting their perspective on the world. This manifests as demand for learning-oriented travel (language immersion, culinary masterclasses, photography workshops, archaeological participation), for challenging or endurance-based experiences (long-distance walking, mountaineering, cold-water swimming, adventure racing), for volunteer and purpose-driven travel, and for culturally immersive experiences that generate personal growth through genuine encounter with difference. The transformation trend reflects a cultural environment in which identity is constructed through experience rather than possession, and in which the social currency of travel lies in the stories, insights, and personal development it generates rather than the destinations visited.

2. Demographic and Generational Change

The rise of the millennial and Generation Z traveller. Millennials (born approximately 1981–1996) and Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012) now constitute the largest and fastest-growing segments of global tourism demand. These generations bring distinctive travel behaviours shaped by digital nativism, social media culture, climate consciousness, diversity and inclusion values, and a preference for experiences over material possessions. Their travel decisions are heavily influenced by social media content (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), peer recommendations, user-generated reviews, and influencer endorsement rather than traditional advertising or brand loyalty. They are more likely to seek unique, off-the-beaten-track destinations, to value local and authentic encounters over resort-based standardisation, to prioritise design-conscious and socially aware accommodation brands, and to expect seamless digital integration throughout the travel journey. Gen Z in particular demonstrates strong stated preferences for sustainability, diversity representation, and social responsibility in the brands they

engage with, though translating these values into consistent purchasing behaviour remains inconsistent.

The silver economy and active ageing tourism. At the other end of the demographic spectrum, the ageing populations of Europe, North America, Japan, and increasingly China and other East Asian nations are creating a large and economically powerful cohort of older travellers with distinctive needs, preferences, and spending capacity. The contemporary generation of retirees is healthier, wealthier, more digitally literate, and more travel-experienced than any previous generation. They seek active, enriching travel experiences – cultural tours, river cruises, walking holidays, educational travel, multi-generational family trips – rather than passive relaxation. They value comfort, safety, accessibility, and quality of service. They travel outside peak seasons (making them valuable for addressing seasonality), stay longer, and spend more per trip than younger travellers. The silver economy trend has implications for destination infrastructure (accessibility, healthcare proximity, transport), accommodation design (universal design principles, ground-floor rooms, walk-in showers), and product development (pacing, intellectual stimulation, social facilitation).

Solo travel and the independent traveller. Solo travel has grown from a niche phenomenon into a mainstream trend, driven by changing household structures (later marriage, higher rates of single living, divorce), by the empowerment narrative associated with independent travel (particularly for women), and by the practical enablers of digital connectivity that make navigating unfamiliar environments safer and more accessible than ever. Solo travel is no longer confined to backpackers; it spans all age groups and market segments, from budget-conscious millennials to affluent solo female travellers seeking luxury experiences on their own terms. The trend has generated an entire ecosystem of solo-friendly products: accommodations designed for single occupancy without financial penalty, group tours that cater to solo travellers, social spaces within hotels that facilitate connection among independent guests, and safety-focused services including female-only accommodation, real-time location sharing, and solo traveller review platforms.

The emerging middle classes of the Global South. The most consequential demographic trend in global tourism is the explosive growth of outbound travel from countries whose populations are achieving middle-class income levels for the first time. China's outbound travel market, which barely existed before the 2000s, had grown to approximately 155 million trips annually before the pandemic. India, Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, and other populous nations with expanding middle classes are generating rapidly growing outbound tourism flows that are reshaping global demand patterns, destination marketing, and the cultural dynamics of international tourism. These new source markets bring different cultural expectations, different travel behaviours, different dietary requirements, different communication norms, and different spending patterns than the Western European and North American travellers who historically dominated international tourism. Destinations, hospitality organisations, and tourism policy-makers who understand and adapt to these culturally diverse demand patterns will capture the growth; those who assume that the conventions of Western tourism are universal will miss it.

3. Technology-Mediated Travel Culture

Social media as the primary travel inspiration and validation engine. Social media platforms have fundamentally altered how travel decisions are made, experiences are shared, and destinations are perceived. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest, and Xiaohongshu (Red) function as discovery engines where travellers encounter destinations, accommodation, and experiences through visually compelling user-generated content rather than through traditional

marketing. The “Instagrammability” of a destination or property has become a genuine competitive factor, influencing everything from hotel design and restaurant presentation to destination infrastructure and visitor management. TikTok’s short-form video format has accelerated the speed at which destinations and experiences can go viral, creating sudden demand surges for locations that appear in trending content – a phenomenon that has caught destination managers unprepared and raised concerns about the cultural and environmental consequences of social media-driven tourism. The cultural dynamic is significant: social media has transformed travel from a private experience into a performed identity, where the documentation and sharing of travel serves social signalling functions (demonstrating taste, adventurousness, cultural capital, or environmental consciousness) as much as it serves personal enjoyment.

Artificial intelligence and the transformation of travel discovery. Generative AI is rapidly changing how travellers research, plan, and book travel. AI-powered conversational assistants can produce personalised itineraries, compare accommodation options, answer destination-specific questions, and make recommendations based on individual preferences in seconds – tasks that previously required hours of manual research or the services of a human travel agent. This trend has profound implications for destinations and hospitality organisations: visibility in AI-generated recommendations is becoming as important as search engine rankings, giving rise to the emerging discipline of Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) discussed elsewhere in this programme. AI is also transforming the on-trip experience through real-time translation services that reduce language barriers, AI-powered personalisation of hotel services and activity recommendations, dynamic pricing algorithms that adjust rates based on demand patterns, and predictive analytics that help destination managers anticipate and manage visitor flows. The cultural implication is that the human curatorial function in travel – the travel agent, the guidebook author, the concierge – is being supplemented and in some segments replaced by algorithmic mediation, with consequences for whose knowledge is valued, which destinations are promoted, and how travel culture is shaped.

The digital nomad and remote work travel phenomenon. The normalisation of remote and hybrid working following the COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant new travel category: people who combine work and travel by living in destinations for weeks or months while working remotely. The digital nomad phenomenon has generated policy responses (digital nomad visas in over 50 countries), product innovations (co-working spaces in hotels and resorts, serviced apartments designed for long-stay working guests, “workation” packages), and cultural consequences (the gentrification of popular nomad destinations such as Lisbon, Bali, Mexico City, and Chiang Mai, where the influx of remote workers with high-income-country salaries drives up rents and displaces local residents). The trend blurs the traditional boundary between tourism and migration, between leisure and work, and between visitor and resident, creating governance challenges for destinations that must manage the economic benefits and social costs of a population that is neither tourist nor permanent resident.

4. The Evolving Relationship Between Tourism and Place

Slow travel and the rejection of the bucket-list mentality. A growing counter-trend to the hyper-connected, social media-driven, destination-hopping model of contemporary tourism is the slow travel movement. Slow travel emphasises depth over breadth, staying longer in fewer places, travelling overland rather than flying, immersing in local rhythm and daily life rather than rushing between attractions, and valuing the journey as an experience in itself rather than merely a means of reaching a destination. The trend reflects broader cultural currents including the slow

food movement, mindfulness culture, environmental consciousness (particularly flight shame or flygskam originating in Scandinavia), and a reaction against the performative, quantity-over-quality approach to travel that social media can encourage. Slow travel has practical implications for destination development (the value of accommodation and experiences in secondary towns and rural areas along overland routes), for transport policy (investment in scenic and comfortable rail travel, walking and cycling infrastructure), and for the hospitality product (longer-stay accommodation formats, kitchen facilities, local neighbourhood guides rather than tourist-attraction maps).

Regenerative and community-centred tourism. The regenerative tourism movement, examined in preceding modules, is manifesting as a consumer trend as well as a policy paradigm. A growing number of travellers actively seek experiences that leave the places they visit better than they found them: conservation volunteering, community development contributions, cultural preservation participation, and environmental restoration activities. This trend goes beyond responsible tourism (minimising harm) toward positive-impact tourism (actively contributing to the wellbeing of destinations). It reflects a cultural shift in which travellers increasingly want to feel that their journey has purpose and contributes something of value to the world rather than merely extracting experiences from it. Operators responding to this trend include those offering “conservation credits” bundled with safari bookings, hotel programmes that involve guests in local reforestation or beach cleaning, culinary experiences that directly support smallholder farmers, and heritage tourism models that fund the preservation of the sites being visited.

Dark tourism, memorial tourism, and the tourism of difficult heritage. The growing interest in visiting sites associated with death, suffering, conflict, and atrocity – concentration camps, genocide memorials, battlefields, disaster sites, prisons – represents a culturally complex trend that intersects with education, remembrance, identity, and voyeurism. Dark tourism has expanded significantly as a field of both academic study and commercial practice, raising questions about the ethics of commodifying suffering, the role of tourism in collective memory and reconciliation, the line between respectful commemoration and entertainment, and the responsibility of tourism operators and destinations to interpret difficult heritage honestly and sensitively. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, and the Rwanda Genocide Memorials are among the most visited dark tourism sites, each navigating the tension between the obligation to remember and the risks of trivialisation through tourist consumption.

5. Emerging Tourism Typologies Driven by Cultural and Social Forces

The convergence of the trends examined above has generated a proliferation of new tourism typologies that reflect specific cultural motivations, social identities, and lifestyle affiliations.

Tourism Typology	Cultural / Social Driver	Manifestation	Implication for Destinations
Wellness tourism	Self-care culture; post-pandemic health consciousness; mental health awareness	Spa and thermal; yoga and meditation retreats; sleep tourism; forest bathing; digital detox	Wellness infrastructure; trained practitioners; authentic programme design

Tourism Typology	Cultural / Social Driver	Manifestation	Implication for Destinations
Culinary and gastro-tourism	Food as cultural identity; slow food; farm-to-table; terroir	Food tours; cooking classes; wine and spirit trails; market experiences; restaurant pilgrimages	Local food supply chain development; culinary heritage preservation; chef-led experiences
Adventure and challenge tourism	Self-actualisation; endurance culture; social media status	Ultra-marathons; wild swimming; mountaineering; overlanding; polar expeditions	Safety infrastructure; environmental management; rescue capability; insurance frameworks
Screen tourism	Film, TV, and gaming culture; fandom; social media virality	Game of Thrones (Dubrovnik); Lord of the Rings (NZ); Squid Game (South Korea); TikTok-viral locations	Visitor management for sudden demand; authentic storytelling; intellectual property management
Ancestral and roots tourism	Diaspora identity; genealogy culture; DNA testing accessibility	African American heritage tourism; Irish diaspora; Jewish heritage routes; Pacific Islander return visits	Heritage research infrastructure; culturally sensitive interpretation; community engagement
Astro-tourism	Dark sky awareness; space culture; mindfulness and wonder	Dark sky reserves; observatory experiences; star-gazing glamping; eclipse and aurora chasing	Light pollution management; remote-area infrastructure; weather-dependent product design
Digital nomad tourism	Remote work normalisation; lifestyle design; geographic arbitrage	Co-working spaces; long-stay accommodation; digital nomad visas; workation packages	Visa and residency policy; infrastructure (Wi-Fi, co-working); gentrification management
Sleep tourism	Burnout culture; sleep science; wellness convergence	Sleep-optimised hotel rooms; sleep retreats; circadian lighting; sleep diagnostics	Science-informed design; specialist staff; partnership with sleep medicine
Regenerative tourism	Climate consciousness; post-sustainability thinking; purpose-driven travel	Conservation volunteering; reforestation participation; community development trips	Genuine impact measurement; community partnership; avoiding voluntourism pitfalls
Set-jetting	Streaming culture; global content platforms (Netflix, Disney+)	Visiting filming locations from popular series and films; destination marketing tied to screen content	Content partnerships; location management; authentic local narrative alongside screen narrative

Need to Know –

Identifying current tourism trends at the MBA level requires more than listing what is popular. Assessors expect you to: explain the cultural and societal forces driving each trend (not merely describe the trend itself); assess the scale, trajectory, and longevity of each trend (is it a temporary fashion, a structural shift, or somewhere in between?); analyse the implications for destinations, hospitality organisations, and host communities; critically evaluate whether trends create genuine value or reproduce existing problems (does wellness tourism improve wellbeing or commodify self-care? does conscious travel reduce environmental impact or merely signal virtue?); and recognise the interconnections between trends (how digital nomad culture intersects with gentrification, how social media culture drives screen tourism, how wellness and slow travel converge). The strongest work connects trend identification to the broader cultural and societal analysis that this module examines.

Did you know...?

The Global Wellness Institute estimated the global wellness tourism market at approximately \$817 billion in 2024, making it one of the fastest-growing segments of international tourism. Yet the concept of wellness travel is not new – it has roots stretching back thousands of years. The ancient Romans built elaborate bathing complexes (thermae) that functioned as social, cultural, and health centres attracting visitors from across the empire. Medieval European pilgrims travelled to holy wells and thermal springs seeking physical and spiritual healing. The eighteenth and nineteenth-century spa towns of Bath, Baden-Baden, Karlovy Vary, and Vichy were among Europe's first purpose-built tourism destinations, created explicitly to serve the wellness travel market. What is contemporary about wellness tourism is not the motivation but its democratisation, its diversification beyond thermal bathing into mental health, nutrition, sleep, and spiritual wellness, and its integration into mainstream hospitality rather than existing as a separate niche sector.

Industry Insight – How Japan's Tourism Renaissance Reflects and Responds to Global Cultural Trends

Japan's extraordinary tourism growth in the 2020s – from approximately 31 million international visitors in 2019 to a trajectory toward 40 million and beyond – provides a compelling case study of how a destination's cultural assets can align with global tourism trends to produce transformative demand. Japan's tourism renaissance is not merely a marketing success; it reflects a deep alignment between what contemporary travellers seek and what Japanese culture uniquely offers.

Authenticity and cultural depth. Japan's tourism appeal rests on a cultural infrastructure of extraordinary depth and distinctiveness: a cuisine recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, with the world's highest concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants alongside street food, ramen shops, and izakaya that offer culinary experiences at every price point; a living tradition of artisanal craftsmanship (wabi-sabi aesthetics, ceramics, textiles, sake brewing, swordsmithing) that provides authentic experiential tourism content; a built heritage spanning ancient Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, feudal castles, traditional ryokan inns, and ultra-modern architectural innovation; and a cultural sensibility that treats hospitality (omotenashi) as an art form rather than a commercial transaction. This cultural depth aligns precisely with the global trend toward authenticity and meaningful experience: travellers seeking genuine cultural encounter find in Japan a society whose traditions are not staged for tourists but are living expressions of a continuous civilisation.

Wellness convergence. Japan's onsen (hot spring) bathing culture, forest bathing (shinrin-yoku – a practice developed in Japan in the 1980s and now adopted globally), zen meditation traditions, and the meticulous attention to seasonal food align with the global wellness tourism trend. The Japanese aesthetic concept of ma (space, pause, emptiness) resonates with the mindfulness movement. Ryokan hospitality – with its tatami rooms, futon sleeping, kaiseki multi-course dining, and ritual onsen bathing – provides a wellness-integrated accommodation experience that feels culturally authentic rather than commercially manufactured.

Pop culture and screen tourism. Japan's global cultural influence through anime, manga, video games, J-pop, and fashion has created an entirely separate tourism demand stream driven by fandom and pop culture pilgrimage. The Studio Ghibli Museum, anime pilgrimage routes to real-world locations depicted in popular series, the Akihabara electronics and gaming district, cosplay culture, and Japan's prominence in the global gaming industry (Nintendo, PlayStation, Pokémon) attract millions of visitors whose primary motivation is cultural engagement with Japanese popular culture rather than traditional heritage tourism. This pop culture tourism stream skews younger, more digitally engaged, and more culturally participatory than the traditional cultural tourist, and its growth has been accelerated by the global reach of streaming platforms that distribute Japanese content worldwide.

Technology and seamless experience. Japan's technological infrastructure – the shinkansen (bullet train) network, the efficiency and punctuality of public transport, widespread Wi-Fi, advanced contactless payment systems, and AI-powered translation services – provides the seamless digital and physical travel experience that contemporary travellers expect. The technology does not replace the human encounter but enables it: a traveller can navigate Japan's complex rail network, communicate in restaurants, and discover neighbourhood gems through digital tools, overcoming the language barrier that was historically the most significant deterrent to independent travel in Japan.

Challenges and critical assessment. Japan's tourism boom has also generated challenges that reflect the tensions embedded in global tourism trends. Overtourism is acute at iconic sites: Kyoto's geisha district (Gion) has been overwhelmed by tourists seeking photos, leading to photography bans and access restrictions. The torii gates of Fushimi Inari, the bamboo groves of Arashiyama, and Mount Fuji have experienced visitor pressure that degrades both the experience and the environment. The weak yen has attracted visitors but also raised concerns about the sustainability of a tourism model in which Japan becomes a budget destination for wealthy-nation visitors. Community tension has emerged in residential neighbourhoods affected by tourist congestion, noise, and the proliferation of short-term rental accommodation. And the cultural encounters that tourists seek are in some cases becoming performances that residents experience as intrusions rather than exchanges. Japan's experience demonstrates both the power of cultural alignment with global trends and the governance challenges that successful alignment creates.

Japan's tourism renaissance illustrates the central analytical point of this section: that current tourism trends are not random market fluctuations but expressions of deep cultural and societal shifts – the search for authenticity, the wellness imperative, the pop culture economy, the digital transformation of travel, and the tension between growth and sustainability – that destinations can align with strategically when they understand the cultural forces at work.

Over to You – Activity

This activity requires you to source and critically engage with a peer-reviewed journal article that examines a current trend in tourism from a cultural or societal perspective.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that analyses a current tourism trend discussed in this section (or an emerging trend not yet covered) through a cultural, societal, or behavioural lens. Suitable articles might examine: wellness tourism motivations, social media's influence on travel behaviour, generational differences in travel values, solo travel culture, slow travel as a counter-trend, dark tourism ethics, digital nomad impacts, culinary tourism and cultural identity, screen tourism and destination management, or the emergence of new tourism typologies.

Suggested search terms: “wellness tourism motivation culture” • “social media travel behaviour” • “Generation Z travel values” • “slow travel culture” • “dark tourism ethics” • “digital nomad gentrification” • “screen tourism destination” • “authenticity tourism experience” • “conscious travel sustainability gap” • “transformative travel”

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the trend the article examines and the cultural or societal forces driving it. Assess whether the article treats the trend as a structural shift or a temporary fashion, and whether you agree with that assessment. Evaluate the implications for destinations and hospitality organisations: does the trend create opportunities, challenges, or both? Consider whether the trend interacts with other trends from this section. Conclude with a reflection on what the trend reveals about the evolving cultural relationship between tourism and society – how is the meaning and purpose of travel changing, and what does this mean for how hospitality and tourism organisations should respond?

Revision on the Go

- Current tourism trends reflect deeper cultural and societal shifts, not just market fluctuations: the search for authenticity, experience over possession, self-care culture, climate consciousness, and digital transformation.
- Shifting values: authenticity and meaning-seeking (MacCannell); conscious and responsible travel (intention-behaviour gap remains significant); wellness as mainstream motivation (\$817 billion market); experience economy evolving toward transformative travel.
- Demographic change: millennials and Gen Z (digital-native, experience-driven, sustainability-conscious); silver economy (healthier, wealthier, longer-staying retirees); solo travel mainstreamed; emerging middle classes of China, India, Brazil reshaping global demand.
- Technology-mediated culture: social media as primary discovery engine; Instagrammability as competitive factor; AI transforming travel planning and personalisation; digital nomadism blurring tourism-migration-work boundaries.
- Tourism and place: slow travel as counter-trend (depth over breadth, overland over flying); regenerative tourism (positive-impact travel); dark tourism (ethical complexities of commodifying suffering).
- Emerging typologies: wellness, culinary, adventure, screen/set-jetting, ancestral/roots, astro, digital nomad, sleep, regenerative tourism – each driven by specific cultural forces.
- Trends interact: social media drives screen tourism; wellness and slow travel converge; digital nomadism creates gentrification; conscious travel values conflict with budget-driven behaviour.
- Critical assessment matters: stated sustainability preferences often do not translate to purchasing behaviour; trend identification must distinguish structural shifts from temporary fashions.

- The fundamental cultural shift: travel is increasingly conceived as identity construction through experience rather than consumption of destinations.

Case Study – The Rise of Sleep Tourism: When a Basic Human Need Becomes a Luxury Travel Trend

Background

In an era of global burnout culture, chronic sleep deprivation, and heightened health consciousness, a remarkable tourism trend has emerged: sleep tourism. Travellers are choosing destinations, hotels, and experiences specifically to improve their sleep. What was once the most basic function of a hotel room – providing a place to sleep – has been transformed into the primary value proposition of a growing segment of the luxury hospitality market. The trend illustrates how cultural and societal forces – in this case, the intersection of wellness culture, technology-enabled health tracking, sleep science, and the burnout epidemic – generate entirely new tourism products and demand categories.

The Cultural Forces

The sleep tourism trend is driven by the convergence of several cultural forces. The burnout epidemic, recognised by the World Health Organization as an occupational phenomenon, has made rest and recovery culturally acceptable – and even aspirational – in societies that previously valorised overwork. The popularisation of sleep science through bestselling books, podcasts, and media coverage has elevated sleep from an unconscious biological function to a consciously managed wellness practice. Wearable technology (smartwatches, sleep trackers, health rings) has made sleep quality a quantifiable metric that health-conscious consumers actively monitor and seek to optimise. And the broader wellness tourism trend has created a market infrastructure – retreat centres, specialist programme designers, wellness-focused hotel brands – within which sleep-specific offerings can be developed and marketed.

The Hospitality Response

The hospitality industry has responded with a proliferation of sleep-focused products across the luxury and upper-upscale segments. Park Hyatt New York introduced a dedicated sleep suite designed in partnership with sleep science researchers, featuring a specialised mattress, blackout environment, circadian-tuned lighting, a curated aromatherapy programme, sleep-inducing soundscapes, and pre-sleep and post-sleep rituals guided by in-room technology. Six Senses hotels have developed comprehensive sleep programmes incorporating sleep tracking, personalised sleep assessments with on-site wellness practitioners, nutrition plans optimised for sleep quality, and room environments designed around individual circadian profiles. Cadogan's Sleepcation in London offers a dedicated sleep experience including a sleep concierge, a pillow menu, a sleep-inducing treatment menu, and a wake-up programme designed to optimise the transition from sleep to alertness. Zedwell Hotels has built its entire brand proposition around sleep quality, designing acoustically isolated, technology-free rooms in central London locations, positioning superior sleep as the antidote to urban overstimulation. And destination-level sleep tourism has emerged: Finland markets itself as a sleep tourism destination based on its clean air, dark winter nights, silence, and sauna culture; Switzerland's alpine retreats offer sleep altitude programmes; and Japan's forest bathing centres incorporate sleep programmes as an extension of the shinrin-yoku wellness tradition.

Critical Assessment

The sleep tourism trend invites critical assessment from the cultural and societal perspective that this module examines. On one level, it represents a genuine and positive response to a real health crisis: chronic sleep deprivation affects an estimated one-third of adults in developed countries and is associated with serious health consequences including cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment,

and mental health disorders. Tourism that genuinely improves sleep habits and educates guests about sleep science creates lasting health benefits that extend beyond the stay. On another level, sleep tourism can be critiqued as the ultimate expression of the commodification of basic human needs under capitalism: the transformation of rest – a fundamental biological requirement – into a luxury experience available only to those who can afford premium hotel rates. The irony that many of the travellers seeking sleep tourism are the same high-income professionals whose overwork created their sleep deficit in the first place raises questions about whether the trend addresses the symptom (poor sleep) rather than the cause (a culture that treats exhaustion as a status symbol). And the marketing of sleep as a luxury amenity raises equity concerns: if superior sleep requires a £1,000-per-night hotel room with a sleep concierge and a circadian lighting system, what does this say about the society that has created conditions in which sleep is a privilege rather than a right?

Discussion Questions

1. Using the five thematic areas from this section (shifting values, demographic change, technology, tourism and place, emerging typologies), identify all the cultural and societal forces that converge to produce the sleep tourism trend. Which force is most significant?
2. Assess whether sleep tourism is a structural shift that will become a permanent feature of the hospitality landscape or a temporary trend that will fade as the novelty diminishes. What evidence would you need to make this determination?
3. The case describes sleep tourism as the commodification of a basic human need. Using the sociological and cultural analysis frameworks from this module, evaluate this critique. Is sleep tourism genuinely problematic, or is it a natural and beneficial response to a real health challenge?
4. If you were a hotel general manager considering adding a sleep tourism programme to your property, what cultural and market research would you conduct before committing to the investment? How would you distinguish between genuine demand and media-driven hype?
5. Sleep tourism currently exists almost exclusively in the luxury segment. Could it be democratised – made accessible to travellers at lower price points – without losing its value proposition? What would a mid-market sleep tourism product look like?

1.2 Analyse the current trends identified in context of tourism and an organisation in the hospitality and tourism sector

Introduction

The previous section identified the major current trends in tourism driven by cultural and societal forces. This section moves from identification to applied analysis, examining how those trends translate into strategic implications, operational challenges, and competitive opportunities for specific hospitality and tourism organisations. At the MBA level, the ability to connect macro-level trends with organisation-level strategy is the competency that transforms cultural awareness into actionable business intelligence.

Analysing trends in context requires a structured analytical approach. A trend that is globally significant may be irrelevant to a specific organisation if its target market, geographic position, or operational model is misaligned. Conversely, a trend that appears niche at the global level may represent a transformative opportunity for a particular organisation whose assets, brand, and capabilities position it to respond ahead of competitors. This section provides a framework for contextual trend analysis, examines how different types of hospitality and tourism organisations are affected by and responding to the trends identified, and develops the analytical skill of connecting cultural observation to strategic and operational recommendation.

1. A Framework for Contextual Trend Analysis

Translating a broad cultural or societal trend into an organisational analysis requires a structured assessment across five dimensions.

Relevance assessment. The first question is whether the trend is relevant to the organisation's specific context. Relevance is determined by the alignment between the trend and the organisation's target market demographics, geographic location, brand positioning, product offering, and competitive environment. The wellness tourism trend is highly relevant to a luxury resort with spa facilities and natural surroundings but less immediately relevant to a budget airport hotel. The digital nomad trend is relevant to a co-working-enabled city hotel or a long-stay villa complex but less relevant to a cruise line or a theme park. The conscious travel trend is relevant to virtually every tourism organisation but its strategic significance varies depending on the degree to which the organisation's target market segment has adopted sustainability as a purchasing criterion. Relevance assessment prevents organisations from chasing every emerging trend and focuses strategic attention on those that most directly affect their competitive position and growth prospects.

Impact analysis. For trends assessed as relevant, the next question is what the trend's specific impact will be on the organisation. Impact can be assessed across multiple dimensions: demand impact (will the trend increase, decrease, or redirect demand for the organisation's product?), competitive impact (does the trend create advantage for the organisation or for its competitors?), operational impact (does the trend require changes to service delivery, staffing, technology, or physical infrastructure?), financial impact (does responding to the trend require investment, and will that investment generate sufficient return?), and brand impact (does the trend create opportunities or threats for the organisation's brand positioning and reputation?). Impact analysis transforms a general trend observation into a specific organisational assessment that quantifies the stakes and clarifies the strategic urgency of response.

Capability assessment. The organisation's ability to respond to a relevant trend depends on whether it possesses – or can acquire – the capabilities required to capitalise on the opportunity or manage the threat. Responding to the wellness trend requires wellness expertise, appropriate facilities, and trained practitioners. Responding to the AI transformation requires digital infrastructure, data capabilities, and technology partnership or internal expertise. Responding to the authenticity trend requires cultural knowledge, local relationships, and a brand identity that guests perceive as genuine. Responding to the conscious travel trend requires genuine sustainability credentials, transparent reporting, and operational changes that go beyond marketing rhetoric. Capability assessment identifies what the organisation can do now, what it needs to develop, and what the gap between current capability and trend requirement implies for investment, hiring, partnership, or strategic repositioning.

Competitive positioning. Trend analysis must assess how the organisation's competitive set is responding to the same trend. If competitors are already invested in the trend, the organisation risks falling behind if it does not respond. If competitors have not yet moved, there may be a first-mover advantage available. If the trend creates a new competitive dimension that was not previously relevant – as sustainability credentials are increasingly becoming a factor in destination and accommodation choice – the organisation must assess where it stands relative to both current competitors and potential new entrants who may be better positioned to capitalise on the emerging demand. Competitive positioning analysis prevents organisations from analysing trends in isolation from their competitive context and ensures that strategic responses are calibrated to the actions and capabilities of rivals.

Strategic response options. The analysis culminates in the identification of strategic response options: what the organisation should do in response to the trend. Options range along a spectrum from leading (investing aggressively to establish a differentiated position aligned with the trend before competitors), through adapting (making measured changes to product, marketing, and operations to remain relevant as the trend develops), to monitoring (tracking the trend's evolution without committing significant resources until its trajectory is clearer). The appropriate response depends on the trend's assessed relevance, impact, the organisation's capability, and the competitive dynamics. Not every trend requires immediate action; strategic patience is appropriate when a trend's longevity is uncertain or when the organisation's resources are better deployed elsewhere.

Table 1. Contextual Trend Analysis Framework

Analysis Dimension	Core Question	Key Considerations
Relevance	Is this trend significant for our specific organisation?	Target market alignment; geographic fit; brand positioning; product compatibility; competitive environment
Impact	How will this trend affect our demand, competition, operations, finances, and brand?	Demand direction; competitive advantage or threat; operational requirements; investment and return; reputation
Capability	Can we respond effectively, and what gaps must we address?	Current capabilities; development needs; investment required; hiring/partnership; timeline

Analysis Dimension	Core Question	Key Considerations
Competitive Positioning	How are our competitors responding to this trend?	Competitor investment; first-mover opportunity; new entrants; emerging competitive dimensions
Strategic Response	What should we do: lead, adapt, or monitor?	Resource availability; trend certainty; competitive urgency; strategic fit; risk tolerance

2. Trend Analysis Across Different Organisational Contexts

The significance and implications of tourism trends vary dramatically depending on the type of organisation. This section demonstrates how the same trends produce different strategic imperatives across four distinct organisational contexts.

Luxury hotel and resort operators. For luxury operators, the convergence of the authenticity, wellness, and experience economy trends represents the defining strategic challenge and opportunity. The contemporary luxury traveller increasingly rejects standardised opulence in favour of distinctive, culturally rooted experiences that connect them with the character of a place. This has driven luxury brands toward hyper-local positioning: locally sourced cuisine crafted by chefs with deep knowledge of regional food traditions, spa treatments using indigenous botanicals and traditional healing practices, guest activities designed around genuine cultural encounter rather than generic excursions, and property design that reflects local architectural vernacular rather than international luxury conventions. The wellness trend has expanded from an amenity (a spa within the resort) to a foundational proposition (the entire property designed around wellbeing), exemplified by brands such as Six Senses, Aman, and COMO whose strategies integrate wellness into every dimension of the guest experience. The conscious travel trend places additional pressure on luxury operators: high-spending guests increasingly expect credible sustainability credentials alongside exceptional service, making greenwashing more reputationally dangerous and genuine environmental commitment more competitively valuable. For luxury operators, the strategic response is typically to lead – investing in trend-aligned positioning before mass-market competitors can follow – because the luxury segment's price premiums provide the financial margin to fund innovation and differentiation.

Budget and mid-market accommodation providers. Budget and mid-market operators face a different relationship with the same trends. The authenticity trend creates both a competitive threat and an opportunity: the threat comes from platforms such as Airbnb that offer authentic local accommodation at competitive prices, undermining the standardised mid-market hotel proposition; the opportunity lies in reimagining mid-market hospitality with local character, design distinctiveness, and neighbourhood connection that differentiates from both commodity budget chains and unregulated short-term rentals. Brands such as Moxy, citizenM, and The Hoxton have demonstrated that trend-responsive mid-market hospitality is commercially viable, combining design quality, social atmosphere, technology-enabled efficiency, and culturally engaged brand personality at accessible price points. The digital nomad trend creates a direct revenue opportunity for mid-market properties in popular nomad destinations, through extended-stay rates, co-working facilities, and workation packages – revenue that fills rooms during traditionally low-demand periods. However, the conscious travel trend places mid-market operators in a difficult position: sustainability investment increases costs that price-sensitive guests may not be willing to absorb, creating a strategic dilemma between environmental responsibility and commercial viability that luxury operators face less acutely.

Destination marketing and management organisations. For DMOs, trend analysis has a fundamentally different character because the “product” is not a single property or service but an entire destination ecosystem comprising multiple operators, communities, and environments. The overtourism trend requires DMOs in popular destinations to shift from marketing (attracting more visitors) to management (dispersing visitors spatially and temporally, managing carrying capacity, and balancing resident and visitor needs). The social media trend demands that DMOs develop digital content strategies that position the destination compellingly on platforms where travel decisions are made, while managing the consequences of social media-driven tourism surges at locations that go viral. The slow travel trend creates opportunities for DMOs to promote secondary destinations, rural regions, and overland routes that disperse visitor pressure away from congested hotspots. The emerging source market trend requires DMOs to develop market intelligence and culturally adapted communication for Chinese, Indian, and other non-Western visitor segments whose needs and expectations differ significantly from traditional Western markets. And the conscious travel trend creates both a marketing opportunity (positioning the destination as responsible and sustainable) and a governance imperative (ensuring that the destination’s sustainability claims are substantiated by genuine practice rather than undermined by greenwashing).

Tour operators and experience providers. The experience economy and transformative travel trends have the most direct and consequential impact on tour operators and experience providers, because these trends redefine what travellers expect from organised experiences. The shift from sightseeing to participation, from observation to immersion, and from consumption to personal growth requires operators to redesign their products around active engagement, cultural depth, and narrative meaning. The culinary tourism trend has created an entire industry of food tours, cooking classes, wine experiences, and farm-to-table encounters that barely existed two decades ago. The adventure trend has expanded from extreme sports into wellness-adjacent activities such as wild swimming, forest bathing, and endurance walking. The screen tourism trend creates opportunities for operators in filming locations but also challenges of managing sudden demand surges. And the AI transformation trend threatens traditional tour operators with disintermediation – AI-powered travel planners can assemble personalised itineraries that may reduce demand for human-curated tour packages – while simultaneously creating opportunities for operators who integrate AI into their own product development, personalisation, and customer communication.

Table 2. Trend Impact Across Organisational Contexts

Trend	Luxury Hotels	Budget / Mid-Market	DMOs	Tour Operators
Authenticity	Hyper-local positioning; indigenous design; cultural programme	Local character differentiation vs Airbnb; design-led mid-market brands	Promote genuine cultural encounters; manage commodification risk	Immersive, participatory experiences replace sightseeing tours
Wellness	Foundational proposition; entire property designed around wellbeing	Wellness-adjacent amenities; sleep quality; green spaces	Wellness destination positioning; practitioner training	Wellness retreats; yoga holidays; forest bathing experiences
Conscious travel	Sustainability credentials expected; greenwashing dangerous	Cost-sustainability tension; mid-market affordability vs responsibility	Destination sustainability claims must be substantiated	Responsible itinerary design; community benefit; carbon awareness

Trend	Luxury Hotels	Budget / Mid-Market	DMOs	Tour Operators
Gen Z / Millennials	Design, authenticity, social media presence; purpose alignment	Digital-first booking; design quality; social spaces; shareable moments	Social media content strategy; influencer engagement; TikTok management	Unique, off-the-beaten-track experiences; social media-friendly design
AI transformation	Personalisation; concierge AI; guest preference learning	Self-service automation; dynamic pricing; chatbot communication	AI-powered visitor flow management; predictive analytics	Disintermediation threat; AI itinerary planning; personalised offers
Digital nomads	Long-stay luxury apartments; executive co-working	Extended-stay rates; co-working spaces; workation packages	Digital nomad visa policy; infrastructure; gentrification management	Workation experience packages; local immersion programmes
Slow travel	Longer-stay properties; immersive destination programmes	Rail-adjacent properties; bicycle-friendly accommodation	Promote secondary destinations; overland routes; off-peak	Multi-day walking; cycling; slow itineraries; deeper encounters
Silver economy	Accessibility; comfort; enriching cultural programming; multigenerational	Universal design; ground-floor rooms; accessibility compliance	Accessibility infrastructure; shoulder-season targeting	Pacing; intellectual depth; premium comfort; health and safety

3. From Trend Analysis to Strategic and Operational Response

The analytical framework and organisational context analysis above generate insight; the final step is translating that insight into strategic and operational action. At the MBA level, this translation must be specific, evidence-informed, and realistic about the organisation's resources and competitive position.

Product development. Trends frequently create demand for products and experiences that do not yet exist in the organisation's portfolio. A hotel responding to the wellness trend may need to develop spa programmes, recruit wellness practitioners, redesign food and beverage menus around nutritional wellness, and create guest wellbeing rituals that differentiate its offering. A tour operator responding to the screen tourism trend may need to develop new itineraries around filming locations, negotiate intellectual property agreements, and train guides in narrative storytelling that connects the screen content with the genuine heritage of the location. Product development must be guided by genuine understanding of the cultural motivation behind the trend rather than superficial imitation: a hotel that installs a meditation room without understanding the mindfulness practice it references will produce an inauthentic experience that trend-aware guests will recognise as tokenistic.

Marketing and communication. Trends reshape how organisations communicate with their markets. The social media trend requires hospitality organisations to produce visually compelling, platform-native content rather than repurposing traditional marketing materials. The AI transformation demands that organisations optimise their digital presence for visibility in AI-generated recommendations (GEO) as well as in traditional search engines (SEO). The conscious travel trend requires sustainability communication that is credible, specific, and substantiated – because travellers who value sustainability are also the most likely to detect and

penalise greenwashing. The generational shift toward Gen Z and millennial travellers requires communication through the platforms, formats, and tonal registers that these audiences use and trust – which are fundamentally different from the channels that reached older demographics. The emerging source market trend requires culturally adapted marketing: communication in the appropriate language, through the appropriate platforms (Xiaohongshu and WeChat rather than Instagram for the Chinese market), and with cultural sensitivity to the expectations and norms of the target audience.

Operational adaptation. Some trends require changes to the way the organisation operates, not merely what it markets. The wellness trend may require adjusting check-in and check-out times to accommodate wellness programme schedules, redesigning restaurant menus to include nutritional information and plant-based options, training all staff (not just spa therapists) in a wellness-oriented service philosophy, and investing in physical infrastructure such as blackout blinds, noise insulation, air purification, and circadian lighting systems. The digital nomad trend may require upgrading Wi-Fi capacity, creating co-working zones, offering monthly rates, and adapting housekeeping schedules for long-stay guests. The conscious travel trend may require rethinking procurement (eliminating single-use plastics, sourcing locally), energy management (renewable energy, efficiency monitoring), waste management (composting, recycling, food waste reduction), and water management (conservation systems, greywater recycling). Operational adaptation is where strategic intent meets daily reality, and where the gap between aspiration and execution is most visible to guests.

Workforce and culture. Trends create new requirements for the skills, attitudes, and cultural alignment of the workforce. Staff who were trained in efficient, standardised service delivery may need to develop the cultural knowledge, storytelling ability, and personal warmth required to deliver authentic, immersive experiences. Wellness-focused operations require practitioners with genuine qualifications and deep knowledge, not generalists given a brief orientation. Sustainability-committed organisations need staff who understand and believe in the environmental mission rather than merely complying with procedures they do not support. And the AI transformation requires a workforce that is comfortable working alongside technology, using digital tools to enhance (not replace) human hospitality, and adapting to new systems with agility. Workforce and culture transformation is typically the slowest and most challenging dimension of trend response, because it involves changing people's skills, habits, and beliefs rather than merely installing new technology or redesigning a menu.

Measurement and feedback. The organisation's response to trends must be measured to determine whether it is effective. This requires defining KPIs that connect trend response to business outcomes: guest satisfaction scores for wellness programme participants, booking conversion rates for sustainability-positioned packages, length of stay for digital nomad guests, social media engagement metrics for content strategy, revenue per guest for experience-focused products, and employee retention rates following cultural transformation programmes. Measurement also requires listening systems that detect how guests perceive the organisation's trend response: review analysis, guest feedback surveys, social media sentiment monitoring, and direct conversation. The most valuable organisations are those that create a continuous loop between cultural observation, strategic response, operational execution, guest feedback, and iterative refinement – treating trend response as an ongoing adaptive process rather than a one-time strategic decision.

Analysing trends in the context of a specific organisation at the MBA level requires more than describing trends and listing possible responses. Assessors expect you to: apply a structured analytical framework (relevance, impact, capability, competitive positioning, strategic response) rather than offering unstructured observations; differentiate your analysis by organisational type, showing how the same trend creates different imperatives for different organisations; connect trend analysis to specific strategic and operational actions (product development, marketing, operations, workforce, measurement) rather than remaining at the level of general recommendation; critically evaluate whether the organisation's resources and capabilities realistically support the response you propose; and demonstrate awareness that trend response must be authentic and substantive – superficial or performative responses to cultural trends are quickly detected by contemporary consumers and can damage rather than enhance brand credibility.

Did you know...?

A Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report surveying over 30,000 travellers across 32 countries found that 76 per cent of respondents stated they wanted to travel more sustainably in the coming year, yet only 43 per cent reported having stayed in a sustainable accommodation in the past twelve months. This intention-behaviour gap is one of the most significant findings for hospitality organisations analysing the conscious travel trend in context. It means that sustainability credentials alone are unlikely to drive booking decisions for the majority of guests; however, when price, location, and quality are comparable, sustainability increasingly functions as a tiebreaker. For organisations, the strategic implication is that sustainability investment must be integrated with rather than substituted for core product quality and competitive pricing – and that communicating sustainability credentials at the point of booking decision can influence choice without requiring sustainability to be the primary motivator.

Industry Insight – How Accor Analyses and Responds to Cultural Trends Across a Multi-Brand Portfolio

Accor, one of the world's largest hospitality groups with over 5,600 properties across more than 40 brands, provides an instructive case study in how a major hospitality organisation analyses cultural and societal trends and translates them into differentiated strategic responses across a multi-brand portfolio. The complexity of Accor's trend response – serving budget travellers through ibis, business travellers through Novotel, lifestyle seekers through Ennismore's portfolio, luxury guests through Raffles and Fairmont, and wellness travellers through Banyan Tree (following its 2024 partnership) – illustrates how the same trends produce different strategic actions depending on organisational context.

The lifestyle and authenticity trend. Accor's most significant trend response has been its partnership with Ennismore, creating a joint venture that manages lifestyle and entertainment brands including The Hoxton, Mama Shelter, Mondrian, SLS, SO/, Delano, 25hours, and Hyde. This portfolio was explicitly constructed to respond to the cultural shift toward authenticity, social connection, and design-conscious hospitality that the previous section identified. Each Ennismore brand occupies a distinctive cultural position: The Hoxton embodies neighbourhood-rooted, locally connected hospitality; Mama Shelter offers affordable cultural exuberance and social energy; Mondrian and SLS deliver design-forward lifestyle luxury; and 25hours provides quirky, culturally engaged urban hospitality. The critical organisational decision was that these brands could not be developed within Accor's traditional corporate structure – the cultural authenticity they required demanded a separate

organisational culture, creative leadership, and brand management approach that a conventional hotel company's systems and processes would stifle. The Ennismore partnership represents a structural response to a cultural trend: creating an organisational vehicle that can deliver authenticity because it is culturally authentic itself.

The wellness trend. Accor's response to the wellness trend operates at multiple levels simultaneously. At the luxury end, the partnership with Banyan Tree brings deep wellness expertise into the group – Banyan Tree's spa heritage, wellness programme design capability, and practitioner training standards provide a credibility that Accor could not have built internally within the same timeframe. At the midscale level, Accor has integrated wellness elements into its mainstream brands: redesigned sleep environments in Novotel rooms, fitness facilities in ibis Styles, healthy menu options across food and beverage, and mindfulness and wellbeing content available through the ALL loyalty app. This layered response illustrates the principle that the same trend requires different responses at different brand positions: luxury brands lead with immersive, specialist wellness propositions, while mid-market brands adapt with wellness-adjacent amenities that enhance the core offering without redefining it.

The conscious travel and sustainability trend. Accor's sustainability response demonstrates both the opportunity and the challenge of analysing the conscious travel trend in the context of a global hospitality organisation. The group's sustainability programme has eliminated single-use plastics from guest rooms, committed to science-based carbon reduction targets, invested in energy efficiency and renewable energy, established local sourcing requirements, and integrated sustainability criteria into its design standards for new builds and renovations. However, the sheer scale of a 5,600-property portfolio means that sustainability implementation is uneven – a company-owned flagship in Paris may achieve sustainability credentials that a franchised economy property in a developing market cannot match, creating a tension between the group's sustainability narrative and the operational reality at property level. This tension is characteristic of large hospitality organisations responding to the conscious travel trend: the brand-level commitment must be translated into property-level practice across diverse geographies, ownership structures, and capability levels, and the gap between the two is where greenwashing accusations find their target.

The technology and AI trend. Accor has invested in digital transformation across its portfolio, deploying mobile check-in, keyless room entry, in-app concierge services, AI-powered chatbots, and dynamic pricing algorithms. The ALL loyalty programme serves as the group's primary data asset, enabling personalisation at scale – using guest preference data to customise communication, room assignment, and service delivery. Accor's response to the AI transformation trend is to integrate AI into the guest journey as an enabler of human hospitality rather than a replacement for it: AI handles transactional tasks (check-in, information queries, booking modifications) while human staff focus on the emotional, relational, and experiential dimensions that AI cannot replicate. This human-plus-AI strategy reflects the organisation's analysis that the technology trend in hospitality is not about replacing human service but about freeing human attention for the high-value interactions that define the guest experience.

The emerging source market trend. Accor's global presence positions it to respond to the emerging middle-class travel trend more effectively than regionally focused competitors. The group has invested in culturally adapted products and services for Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Indian travellers: Chinese-language booking platforms, halal-certified food and beverage options, dedicated Chinese social media presence on Weibo and WeChat, prayer facilities, and culturally sensitive service training for staff in properties that receive significant flows from these markets. This cultural adaptation extends beyond amenities to marketing and communication: understanding that the decision-making journey, the information sources, the booking platforms, and the cultural expectations of a Chinese leisure traveller differ fundamentally from those of a British or American traveller, and that treating the global travel market as culturally homogeneous is a strategic error.

Accor's multi-brand, multi-trend response strategy demonstrates the principle that contextual trend analysis produces different conclusions depending on the brand, market segment, geography, and operational model under examination. The same cultural trend – wellness, authenticity, sustainability, AI, or emerging market demand – generates different strategic imperatives for ibis than for Raffles, for a franchise in Jakarta than for a managed property in Paris, and for the Ennismore lifestyle portfolio than for the traditional hotel brands. The analytical skill at the MBA level is the ability to perform this differentiated, context-specific analysis rather than offering generic trend-response prescriptions that ignore the organisational realities that determine what is possible, appropriate, and commercially viable.

Over to You –Activity

This activity requires you to apply the contextual trend analysis framework to a specific hospitality or tourism organisation, supported by academic evidence.

Task Part A – Academic Foundation (approximately 300–400 words): Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines how a hospitality or tourism organisation has responded to a cultural or societal trend. Suitable articles might examine: a hotel brand's sustainability strategy, a destination's response to social media-driven tourism, an airline's adaptation to changing traveller demographics, a tour operator's product innovation driven by the experience economy, or a hospitality company's digital transformation strategy.

Suggested search terms: “hotel brand sustainability response” • “hospitality innovation cultural trends” • “tourism organisation digital transformation” • “hotel wellness strategy” • “tour operator experience economy” • “destination social media management” • “hospitality Gen Z millennial adaptation”

Task Part B – Applied Analysis (approximately 500–700 words): Select a hospitality or tourism organisation you are familiar with (from professional experience, case study research, or the examples in this study guide) and apply the five-dimension contextual analysis framework to one specific trend from the previous section. Your analysis should: assess the trend's relevance to the organisation's specific context (target market, brand, geography, competitive environment); analyse the trend's impact across demand, competition, operations, finances, and brand dimensions; evaluate the organisation's current capability to respond; assess how the competitive set is responding; and recommend a specific strategic response (lead, adapt, or monitor) with at least two concrete actions across the response domains (product, marketing, operations, workforce, or measurement). Reference your journal article to support your analysis.

Revision on the Go

- Contextual trend analysis uses five dimensions: relevance (does it matter to us?), impact (how does it affect us?), capability (can we respond?), competitive positioning (what are rivals doing?), and strategic response (lead, adapt, or monitor?).
- The same trend produces different imperatives for different organisations: luxury operators lead with investment; mid-market operators adapt with smart integration; DMOs manage destination-level consequences; tour operators redesign experiences.
- Trend response translates into five action domains: product development, marketing and communication, operational adaptation, workforce and culture, and measurement and feedback.

- Authenticity in trend response is critical: superficial or performative responses to cultural trends (wellness tokenism, sustainability greenwashing) are detected by trend-aware consumers and damage credibility.
- The intention-behaviour gap in conscious travel (76% want to travel sustainably; 43% have done so) means sustainability is a tiebreaker, not a primary booking driver, for most guests.
- Multi-brand organisations (Accor, Marriott, IHG) respond to the same trends differently across brand tiers: luxury leads, midscale adapts, economy monitors or integrates selectively.
- Emerging source markets (China, India, Middle East) require culturally adapted products, platforms, and communication – not Western-centric standardisation.
- AI in hospitality is best deployed as human-plus-AI: technology handles transactional tasks; human staff focus on emotional, relational, and experiential interactions.
- Workforce transformation is the slowest and most challenging dimension of trend response – changing skills, habits, and beliefs takes longer than installing technology or redesigning a menu.
- Not every trend requires immediate action: strategic patience is appropriate when a trend's longevity is uncertain or when resources are better deployed elsewhere.
- The most valuable organisations create a continuous loop: cultural observation → strategic response → operational execution → guest feedback → iterative refinement.

Case Study – Analysing Tourism Trends in Context: The Strategic Repositioning of a Mediterranean Resort Group

Background

The Aegean Sun Hotel Group is a fictional company operating six resort properties across the Greek islands of Crete, Santorini, Mykonos, and Rhodes. Established in 1998, the group has historically positioned itself as a quality mid-range beach resort operator targeting Northern European package-holiday travellers, predominantly from Germany, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands. The properties are four-star rated, all-inclusive or half-board, and range from 180 to 350 rooms. The group's average guest profile is couples and families aged 35 to 60 who book through European tour operators, stay for seven to fourteen nights, and are primarily motivated by sun, sea, and relaxation.

By 2025, the group's managing director recognises that several of the cultural and societal trends identified in this module are creating both threats and opportunities that the group's current positioning does not adequately address. Average occupancy has declined from 76 per cent to 68 per cent over three years, average guest age is rising (now 52), the proportion of bookings through tour operators has fallen from 70 per cent to 55 per cent as guests increasingly book directly or through OTAs, average length of stay has shortened from 10 nights to 7, and guest satisfaction scores, while still adequate, show declining enthusiasm in qualitative feedback, with recurring comments that the properties feel “dated,” “generic,” and “lacking character.”

The managing director has commissioned a trend analysis to inform a strategic repositioning programme. The analysis must assess which current tourism trends are most relevant to the group, what their impact will be, and what strategic responses are recommended.

Your Task

Apply the contextual trend analysis framework to the Aegean Sun Hotel Group. For each of the following trends, assess relevance, impact, the group's capability to respond, competitive positioning, and your recommended strategic response.

1. The authenticity and experience economy trend. The guest feedback describing properties as “generic” and “lacking character” suggests that the group’s standardised resort model is misaligned with the contemporary traveller’s desire for culturally distinctive experiences. Analyse this trend’s relevance and impact for the Aegean Sun Group. What specific product development, marketing, and operational changes would you recommend to inject local Greek cultural character into the guest experience without abandoning the mid-range resort model? Consider food and beverage (moving from international buffet to locally sourced Greek cuisine), activities (cultural workshops, village visits, cooking classes), design (incorporating local materials and aesthetics), and service culture (training staff in Greek hospitality traditions).
2. The wellness tourism trend. Assess the feasibility and impact of integrating wellness elements into the Aegean Sun properties. Greece’s climate, natural environment, Mediterranean diet, and wellness traditions (thermal springs, thalassotherapy, olive oil treatments) provide a cultural foundation. What level of wellness integration is realistic for a mid-range resort group: a full wellness repositioning, wellness-adjacent amenities within the existing model, or a pilot programme at one or two properties? Justify your recommendation.
3. The generational shift and digital transformation trends. The group’s rising average guest age and declining bookings from younger segments suggest that its product, marketing, and distribution are not reaching millennial and Gen Z travellers. Analyse the combined impact of the generational shift and digital transformation trends. What changes to the group’s distribution strategy (reducing tour operator dependence, strengthening direct booking, optimising OTA and social media presence), marketing approach (platform selection, content strategy, influencer engagement), and on-property experience (design refresh, social spaces, Instagrammable elements, technology integration) would you recommend?
4. The conscious travel and sustainability trend. Assess the relevance and commercial viability of sustainability investment for a mid-range resort group. What sustainability initiatives would deliver the greatest impact relative to cost? Consider the intention-behaviour gap: how should the group communicate its sustainability credentials without overpromising or greenwashing? What operational changes (energy, water, waste, procurement, single-use plastics) would be most impactful and most visible to guests?
5. The slow travel and seasonality opportunity. The group’s properties currently close for four to five months during winter. The slow travel trend, combined with the digital nomad phenomenon, the silver economy’s preference for shoulder-season travel, and the wellness tourism trend’s year-round relevance, suggests opportunities to extend the operating season. Develop a proposal for a shoulder-season and potentially winter programme at one or two properties, identifying the target market, the product offering, the marketing approach, and the financial case for extending operations.
6. Integrated recommendation. Based on your analysis of all five trends above, develop an integrated strategic repositioning recommendation for the Aegean Sun Hotel Group. Which trends should the group lead on, which should it adapt to, and which should it monitor? How do the trend responses reinforce one another to create a coherent repositioned proposition? What investment would be required, and how would you measure success?

Summary

In this chapter you learnt about the current trends in tourism.

You identified the current trends available in tourism.

On completion of this chapter, you analysed the current trends identified in context of tourism and an organisation in the hospitality and tourism sector.

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Chapter Two – Demonstrate critical knowledge on the changing nature of tourism

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about the changing nature of tourism.

Next, you will address the changes in the nature of tourism, and then identify the issues experienced as a result of the changes.²

Then you will show critical knowledge on the impact towards the culture and society.

On completion of this chapter, you will understand the concepts of postmodern, post-industrial and post-colonial in context of tourism.

Learning Outcomes

On completing the chapter, you will be able to:

2. Demonstrate critical knowledge on the changing nature of tourism

Assessment Criteria

2.1 Address the changes in the nature of tourism

2.2 Identify the issues experienced as a result of the changes

2.3 Show critical knowledge on the impact towards the culture and society

2.4 Explain the concepts of postmodern, post-industrial and post-colonial in context of tourism

2.1 Address the changes in the nature of tourism

Introduction

The preceding sections of this module identified current trends and analysed their implications for specific organisations. This section addresses a deeper question: how is the fundamental nature of tourism itself changing? Trends are surface manifestations of structural transformation; this section examines the underlying shifts in what tourism is, who participates in it, how it is produced and consumed, what it means culturally, and how host societies experience and govern it.

At the MBA level, addressing changes in the nature of tourism requires engaging with the sociological, cultural, and political dimensions of these transformations – not merely their commercial implications. Tourism is a social practice embedded in culture, shaped by power, and experienced differently depending on who you are, where you are, and what position you occupy within the global system. The changes examined in this section are not merely industry developments; they represent shifts in the cultural meaning of travel and the social contract between visitors, hosts, and the places that tourism transforms.

1. From Consumption to Participation: The Changing Role of the Tourist

The tourist as passive consumer. For most of the mass tourism era, the dominant model positioned the tourist as a consumer of pre-packaged experiences. The package holiday exemplified this model: a tour operator assembled transport, accommodation, meals, and excursions into a standardised product that the tourist purchased and consumed with minimal agency over its design. The tourist's role was to arrive, be transported, be accommodated, be entertained, and depart. The destination was a product to be consumed, and the measure of success was satisfaction with what was provided. This consumption model shaped the architecture of the global tourism industry: vertically integrated tour operators, all-inclusive resorts, standardised hotel chains, and mass-market charter airlines all operated on the assumption that the tourist was a receiver of experiences designed, priced, and delivered by commercial intermediaries.

The tourist as co-creator. The nature of tourism is shifting from consumption toward co-creation – a model in which the tourist actively participates in designing, shaping, and contributing to the experience rather than merely receiving it. This shift is driven by digital enablement (travellers can now assemble their own journeys through direct booking, review platforms, and real-time information), by the cultural values of autonomy and personalisation that characterise contemporary consumer culture, and by the experience economy's emphasis on active participation over passive reception. Co-creation manifests in multiple forms: travellers who design their own itineraries using AI-powered planning tools rather than selecting from a tour operator's brochure; guests who contribute to their hotel experience by choosing wellness programmes, cultural activities, and dining options that reflect their individual interests; visitors who participate in cooking classes, artisan workshops, or conservation activities rather than merely observing; and the rise of platforms that enable travellers to connect directly with local hosts, guides, and experience providers without commercial intermediation.

The tourist as content producer. Social media has transformed the tourist from a consumer of destination imagery into a producer of it. The photographs, videos, reviews, blogs, vlogs, and social posts that travellers create during and after their trips now constitute the most influential body of destination marketing content in existence – more trusted by potential travellers than any

official marketing produced by tourism boards or hospitality brands. This role reversal has profound implications: destinations are no longer solely authored by those who market them but are co-authored by everyone who visits and shares their experience. A single TikTok video can reshape a destination's image, create instant demand for an obscure location, or destroy a property's reputation. The tourist-as-content-producer wields cultural power that was previously reserved for professional marketers, travel writers, and guidebook publishers – a democratisation of cultural production that is simultaneously empowering and chaotic.

The tourist as agent of change. The most ambitious reimagining of the tourist's role positions the traveller not merely as a consumer, co-creator, or content producer but as an agent of positive change. Regenerative tourism, voluntourism, conservation travel, and transformative tourism all share the aspiration that the tourist's presence should contribute something of value to the destination and its community rather than merely extracting experience from it. This shift from extraction to contribution represents a fundamental change in the social contract of tourism: the tourist is no longer a customer whose only obligation is to pay and whose satisfaction is the industry's sole purpose, but a participant in a system of mutual exchange whose responsibilities include respect, contribution, and accountability for the consequences of their presence. Whether this aspiration is realisable at scale or remains confined to a small, highly motivated segment of the travelling public is one of the defining questions for the future of tourism.

2. From Destination to Ecosystem: The Changing Nature of Place in Tourism

The destination as product. The traditional conception of a tourism destination was essentially commercial: a place with attractions, accommodation, transport, and services that could be marketed, packaged, and sold to visitors. The destination was a product to be consumed, and its success was measured by the number of visitors it attracted and the revenue it generated. Destination marketing organisations were established to promote this product, and destination development focused on building the infrastructure and attractions that would increase its commercial appeal.

The destination as living system. Contemporary thinking reconceives the destination not as a product but as a complex, living system – an ecosystem of communities, cultures, environments, economies, and governance structures within which tourism is one activity among many. This reconception has profound implications. It means that the success of a destination cannot be measured solely by visitor numbers and revenue but must account for the wellbeing of residents, the health of the environment, the vitality of the culture, and the equity of the economy. It means that residents are not the backdrop to the tourism experience but stakeholders whose quality of life and consent must be central to tourism governance. It means that the natural environment is not a resource to be consumed but an ecosystem whose health determines the destination's long-term viability. And it means that tourism governance must balance the interests of visitors, residents, businesses, and the environment in ways that the product model – which privileged visitor satisfaction and commercial return above all else – did not require.

The dissolution of destination boundaries. Digital technology, the digital nomad phenomenon, and the blurring of work and leisure are dissolving the traditional temporal and spatial boundaries that defined a destination visit. The conventional model – a discrete trip of fixed duration to a defined location – is being supplemented by fluid patterns: digital nomads who live in a destination for months while working remotely; “bleisure” travellers who extend business trips with leisure days; slow travellers who move gradually through a region without a fixed endpoint; repeat visitors who return to the same place regularly and develop quasi-resident relationships with the community; and virtual tourists who experience destinations through VR, live-streamed

content, and metaverse environments without physical travel. These dissolving boundaries challenge the statistical categories through which tourism is measured (who counts as a tourist?), the governance frameworks through which tourism is managed (what regulations apply to a digital nomad who is neither tourist nor resident?), and the cultural dynamics of the host-visitor relationship (when does a visitor become a neighbour, and what rights and responsibilities does each status confer?).

The politicisation of place. In destinations experiencing overtourism, the question of who owns the destination has become acutely political. Resident movements in Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, Lisbon, Edinburgh, and elsewhere have challenged the assumption that tourism growth is inherently beneficial, demanding that the right of residents to liveable cities takes precedence over the right of visitors to access them. Anti-tourism graffiti, protest marches, political campaigns targeting short-term rental platforms, and municipal regulations restricting tourist accommodation all reflect a fundamental change in the politics of tourism: the shift from enthusiastic welcome to contested coexistence. This politicisation represents a change in the nature of tourism itself – from an activity that was broadly celebrated as economically beneficial to one that is increasingly perceived, in the places where it is most concentrated, as a form of extraction that benefits a mobile consuming class at the expense of place-bound communities.

3. From Linear Value Chain to Platform Ecosystem: The Changing Structure of Tourism

The traditional linear value chain. The tourism industry was historically organised as a linear value chain: a tourist in a generating country booked through a travel agent, who purchased capacity from a tour operator, who contracted with an airline, a hotel, a ground handler, and activity providers in the destination. Value flowed sequentially through these intermediaries, each adding cost and capturing margin. The chain was controlled by those who owned the distribution infrastructure – the travel agents and tour operators who mediated between supply and demand – and the balance of power favoured these intermediaries over both the travellers who paid their margins and the local providers who accepted their terms.

The platform revolution. Digital platforms have replaced much of the linear value chain with a platform ecosystem in which travellers connect directly with accommodation providers (Booking.com, Airbnb), experience creators (GetYourGuide, Viator, Airbnb Experiences), transport operators (airline direct booking, ride-hailing apps), and local guides (personal connection through social media). The platform model disintermediates traditional tour operators and travel agents, potentially increasing transparency and consumer choice while reducing the number of intermediaries capturing margin. However, the platforms themselves have become extraordinarily powerful new intermediaries: Booking.com's dominance of online hotel distribution, Airbnb's transformation of urban accommodation markets, and Google's gatekeeping of travel search information have concentrated power in a new set of global technology companies that extract commissions, control algorithmic visibility, and shape traveller behaviour in ways that the previous generation of intermediaries could not.

The AI-mediated future. Generative AI represents the next structural transformation. AI-powered travel assistants can now perform the entire discovery-planning-booking sequence in a single conversational interaction, bypassing both traditional intermediaries and the platform-era intermediaries that replaced them. If a traveller asks an AI assistant to plan a week in Portugal, the AI synthesises information from across the internet, generates a personalised itinerary, recommends specific properties and experiences, and can facilitate booking – all without the

traveller visiting a single OTA, reading a single review, or encountering a single piece of destination marketing. This AI mediation layer is profoundly consequential: it determines which destinations, properties, and experiences are recommended to millions of travellers based on algorithms whose criteria are opaque, whose training data reflects the biases of the internet, and whose commercial relationships with tourism providers are only beginning to be established. The nature of tourism is changing from a market mediated by human judgement (the travel agent's recommendation, the guidebook author's assessment) to one mediated by algorithmic intelligence whose decision-making processes are invisible to both travellers and providers.

4. From Growth Consensus to Contested Purpose: The Changing Social Contract of Tourism

The growth consensus. For most of the post-war era, the social contract of tourism rested on a growth consensus: more tourism was better, for destinations, for economies, for employment, and for the cultural exchange that international travel facilitated. This consensus was shared by governments, industry, development agencies, and most host communities, and it provided the political foundation for the policies, investments, and institutional structures that built the modern tourism industry. The consensus was not without critics – environmental campaigners, community advocates, and cultural preservationists raised concerns from the 1970s onward – but these voices were largely marginal to the political mainstream, which continued to equate tourism growth with progress.

The fracturing of consensus. The growth consensus has fractured in the 2020s under the weight of multiple converging pressures. The overtourism phenomenon has made the costs of unconstrained growth tangible and politically salient in major European cities. The climate crisis has made tourism's carbon footprint a matter of public and policy concern. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of tourism-dependent economies and prompted widespread reflection on whether the pre-pandemic model was worth restoring. The housing affordability crisis in many cities has been linked publicly and politically to short-term rental platforms that convert residential housing into tourist accommodation. And the growing visibility of exploitative labour practices, environmental damage, and cultural commodification has undermined the narrative that tourism's benefits automatically outweigh its costs. The result is a landscape in which the purpose of tourism – what it is for, whom it should serve, and how its benefits and costs should be distributed – is no longer a settled question but an active political, cultural, and ethical debate.

Emerging alternative visions. Multiple alternative visions for the purpose of tourism are competing to fill the space that the fractured growth consensus has opened. The value-over-volume vision argues that tourism should pursue higher revenue per visitor rather than more visitors, selecting for travellers who spend more, stay longer, and generate greater benefit per unit of environmental and social impact. The degrowth vision argues that some destinations have too much tourism and need to deliberately reduce volume to levels that communities and ecosystems can sustain. The regenerative vision argues that tourism should actively improve the places it touches, contributing to ecological restoration, community development, and cultural vitality rather than merely minimising harm. The rights-based vision argues that communities have a right to determine the nature and scale of tourism in their places, and that resident consent should be a precondition for tourism development rather than an afterthought. And the equity vision argues that the distribution of tourism's benefits must be radically restructured so that the people and places that bear tourism's costs also share proportionately in its rewards. These visions are not mutually exclusive, and most real-world policy debates involve elements of

several. But their collective emergence represents a fundamental change in the nature of tourism: from an activity whose purpose was assumed to be self-evident (economic growth and cultural exchange) to one whose purpose is contested and must be continually negotiated among competing interests and values.

Table 1. Structural Changes in the Nature of Tourism

Dimension	From (Traditional Model)	To (Emerging Model)	Implication for Culture and Society
Role of the tourist	Passive consumer of pre-packaged experiences	Co-creator, content producer, and potential agent of positive change	Tourist carries responsibility as well as rights; the host-visitor relationship becomes reciprocal
Concept of destination	Product to be marketed, packaged, and sold	Living ecosystem of communities, cultures, and environments within which tourism operates	Resident wellbeing and environmental health are measures of success alongside visitor satisfaction
Destination boundaries	Discrete trip of fixed duration to defined location	Fluid: digital nomads, bleisure, slow travel, virtual tourism blur temporal and spatial boundaries	Governance must address new categories of presence that defy tourist/resident distinctions
Politics of place	Tourism growth broadly welcomed; consensus on benefit	Contested: overtourism backlash, resident movements, political opposition to unconstrained growth	Tourism becomes a political issue requiring democratic negotiation, not just technocratic management
Industry structure	Linear value chain: agent → operator → airline → hotel	Platform ecosystem: OTAs, Airbnb, social media, AI assistants mediate supply and demand	Power concentrates in platform companies and AI systems with opaque decision-making processes
AI mediation	Human judgement: travel agents, guidebook authors, concierges	Algorithmic intelligence: AI plans, recommends, and facilitates booking autonomously	Which destinations and experiences are recommended depends on algorithms, not human cultural knowledge
Social contract	Growth consensus: more tourism = more benefit for all	Contested purpose: value, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, and equity visions compete	The purpose of tourism is no longer self-evident but must be democratically negotiated

5. Addressing the Changes: Implications for Hospitality and Tourism Managers

For MBA students preparing to lead hospitality and tourism organisations, addressing these changes requires strategic, operational, and ethical responses that go beyond conventional business management.

Strategic reorientation. Organisations must reorient strategy from volume-driven growth models toward value-driven models that measure success by the quality and sustainability of the guest experience, the benefit generated for host communities, and the health of the environmental and

cultural assets upon which the business depends. This requires new metrics: not just RevPAR and occupancy, but guest expenditure quality, local economic retention, carbon intensity per guest-night, employee wellbeing and retention, community sentiment, and cultural authenticity indicators. It requires new investment priorities: cultural programming, sustainability infrastructure, community partnerships, and workforce development rather than capacity expansion alone. And it requires new conversations with investors and owners about what constitutes sustainable business performance in an era where growth without quality and responsibility is increasingly a liability rather than an asset.

Governance and community partnership. The politicisation of tourism means that organisations can no longer operate in communities without engaging with the political and social dynamics that tourism creates. Hotels, resorts, tour operators, and platforms that ignore resident concerns, resist regulation, or treat community relations as a public relations exercise rather than a genuine partnership risk political backlash, regulatory restriction, and reputational damage. Addressing the changes requires organisations to participate constructively in destination governance, to support rather than undermine fair regulation of short-term rentals and tourist accommodation, to invest in community benefit that extends beyond employment to include infrastructure, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship, and to treat the social licence to operate as something that must be earned and maintained rather than assumed.

Ethical leadership. The contested nature of contemporary tourism creates demand for ethical leadership: the ability to navigate competing interests, make decisions that balance commercial viability with community benefit and environmental responsibility, and communicate honestly about the trade-offs involved. Ethical leadership in tourism means acknowledging that tourism creates costs as well as benefits, that those costs fall disproportionately on some communities and environments, and that the responsibility to manage these costs lies with the industry that creates them – not only with the governments that regulate them. It means resisting the temptation to greenwash, to exaggerate sustainability credentials, or to claim community benefit that does not materialise. And it means engaging with the fundamental question that the changes in the nature of tourism have placed at the centre of the industry's future: not “how do we grow?” but “what is tourism for, and whom should it serve?”

Need to Know –

Addressing changes in the nature of tourism at the MBA level requires more than describing what has changed. Assessors expect you to: explain the structural forces driving the changes (not just the surface manifestations); analyse how changes in the tourist's role, the concept of destination, industry structure, and the social contract are interconnected rather than independent; critically evaluate the competing visions for tourism's future purpose (value-over-volume, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, equity); and translate your analysis into specific implications for how hospitality and tourism organisations should be strategically managed, governed, and led. The strongest work recognises that these are not merely industry changes but cultural and political transformations that reshape the relationship between tourism, society, and place – and that managing within them requires ethical judgement alongside commercial competence.

Did you know...?

Venice, one of the world's most iconic tourism destinations, has seen its permanent resident population decline from approximately 175,000 in 1951 to fewer than 50,000 today – while annual tourist visits have grown to over 25 million. In 2024, Venice became the first city in the world to charge a day-tripper entry fee (initially €5 per person), an experiment in managing visitor pressure through pricing that has attracted global attention from other overtouristed destinations. The entry fee generated modest revenue but, critically, it represented a symbolic and political milestone: for the first time, a major destination asserted that the right of visitors to enter was not unconditional but could be managed, priced, and potentially limited by the host community. Venice's experiment encapsulates the changes in the nature of tourism examined in this section: the politicisation of place, the fracturing of the growth consensus, and the emergence of a contested social contract in which resident rights and visitor access must be actively balanced rather than assumed to be compatible.

Industry Insight – Amsterdam's Strategic Response to Changes in the Nature of Tourism: From "I Amsterdam" to "Leave No Trace"

Amsterdam provides one of the most comprehensive examples of a major city-destination addressing the changes in the nature of tourism through deliberate strategic intervention. The city's journey from enthusiastic tourism promotion to active tourism management and demand shaping illustrates how the structural changes examined in this section – the politicisation of place, the fracturing of the growth consensus, the platform revolution, and the emergence of contested purpose – play out in a real governance context.

The growth era. Through the 2000s and 2010s, Amsterdam pursued a conventional growth strategy. The "I amsterdam" branding campaign, launched in 2004, became one of Europe's most recognisable city brands, and its oversized letters in Museumplein became one of the continent's most photographed installations. International arrivals to Amsterdam grew from approximately 4.6 million in 2005 to over 9 million by 2019 – in a city of 870,000 residents. The tourism economy expanded rapidly, generating employment, tax revenue, and investment. But by the mid-2010s, the costs of this growth had become politically unsustainable.

The politicisation of place. Amsterdam's historic centre – a UNESCO World Heritage canal district of extraordinary architectural beauty – was transformed by tourism from a diverse residential neighbourhood into a tourist monoculture. Shops serving residents (butchers, grocers, hardware stores) were replaced by souvenir outlets, waffle stands, and tourist-oriented cannabis cafes. The proliferation of Airbnb converted residential apartments into short-term holiday rentals, reducing housing availability and driving up rents in an already expensive city. Noise, antisocial behaviour, overcrowding, and the erosion of neighbourhood character generated sustained resident anger and political mobilisation. The iconic "I amsterdam" letters were removed from Museumplein in 2018 – a deliberate symbolic act by the city government signalling that Amsterdam was no longer interested in attracting more visitors but in managing the visitors it already had. The gesture illustrated the political dimension of the change in tourism's nature: tourism promotion had become a political liability rather than a political asset.

Platform regulation. Amsterdam has been at the forefront of regulating the platform economy's impact on urban tourism. The city introduced some of Europe's strictest rules on short-term rentals: a maximum of 30 nights per year for Airbnb-style lettings (subsequently reduced further), mandatory registration, a tourist tax applied to short-term rental guests equal to that charged by hotels, and active enforcement including data-sharing agreements with platforms and penalties for non-compliant hosts. The city also introduced regulations targeting Booking.com's market dominance, including requirements for rate parity transparency. These regulatory interventions reflect the structural change from linear value chain to platform ecosystem: the governance challenge is no longer managing

traditional hotel development but managing the impact of technology platforms whose business models transform urban housing markets, neighbourhood character, and resident quality of life.

Demand shaping and visitor selection. Amsterdam's most radical departure from the traditional growth model has been its deliberate strategy to discourage certain visitor segments and attract others. The "Stay Away" campaign targeted young British and Dutch male groups whose behaviour – heavy alcohol consumption, drug use, noise, and public disturbance – was most damaging to residential quality of life and the city's cultural reputation. The city imposed restrictions on pub crawls and party-oriented tour operators, introduced fines for public antisocial behaviour in the red-light and nightlife districts, and considered banning cannabis sales to tourists. Simultaneously, Amsterdam has invested in promoting its cultural assets – museums, design, architecture, food culture, cycling infrastructure, and neighbourhood exploration – to attract visitors whose behaviour and interests align with the kind of tourism the city wants to host. This demand-shaping strategy represents a fundamental change in the social contract of tourism: the city is asserting the right to select its visitors rather than welcoming all comers, based on an explicit judgement that some forms of tourism create value and others create damage.

Visitor dispersal and the "Visit Amsterdam, See Holland" strategy. Recognising that the concentration of tourism in the historic centre was unsustainable, Amsterdam has pursued a dispersal strategy that redirects visitors toward the city's outer neighbourhoods and toward other destinations in the Netherlands. The "Visit Amsterdam, See Holland" campaign encourages visitors to use Amsterdam as a base for day trips to Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague, Utrecht, and other cities that have tourism capacity and would benefit from greater visitor flows. Within Amsterdam, the city promotes North, East, and West neighbourhoods as alternatives to the overwhelmed centre, investing in cultural programming, cycling routes, and local food experiences that give visitors reasons to explore beyond the canal ring. The dispersal strategy addresses the spatial dimension of the change in tourism's nature: the challenge is not total visitor volume but its geographic concentration.

Amsterdam's case demonstrates that addressing changes in the nature of tourism is not a theoretical exercise but an urgent practical governance challenge. The city's response encompasses political action (removing the I Amsterdam sign), platform regulation (short-term rental restrictions), demand shaping (discouraging antisocial tourism), visitor dispersal (redirecting flows beyond the centre), and a fundamental reorientation of the social contract (from "welcome all visitors" to "welcome the right visitors"). For MBA students, Amsterdam illustrates both what effective response looks like and the political courage it requires: every measure the city has taken has generated opposition from industry stakeholders who benefited from the previous model. Addressing changes in the nature of tourism is inherently political, and the capacity for ethical, evidence-informed leadership in this contested environment is the competency this module prepares students to develop.



Over to You – Activity

This activity requires you to analyse a structural change in the nature of tourism and assess its implications for a specific destination or organisation, supported by academic evidence.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines a structural change in the nature of tourism discussed in this section. Suitable articles might examine: the co-creation of tourism experiences, the platform economy's impact on destinations, AI and tourism mediation, the politicisation of tourism in urban destinations, resident attitudes toward tourism, the degrowth or regenerative tourism debate, the dissolution of tourist-resident boundaries through digital nomadism, or the ethics of demand shaping and visitor selection.

Suggested search terms: “tourism co-creation experience” • “platform economy tourism impact” • “Airbnb urban tourism transformation” • “overtourism resident attitudes” • “tourism degrowth debate” • “regenerative tourism practice” • “digital nomad destination impact” • “tourism social contract” • “AI travel planning mediation” • “tourist role changing”

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify which structural change the article examines and which dimension from Table 1 it most closely addresses. Assess whether the article treats the change as positive, negative, or ambivalent, and whether you agree. Evaluate the implications for the specific destination or organisation studied: how has the change affected the host-visitor relationship, the distribution of benefits and costs, or the governance of tourism? Consider how the change connects to other structural changes from this section (they are interconnected, not independent). Conclude with a reflection on which of the competing visions for tourism’s future purpose (value-over-volume, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, equity) the article implicitly or explicitly supports, and whether you consider that vision realistic and desirable.

Revision on the Go

- The nature of tourism is changing across four structural dimensions: the role of the tourist, the concept of destination, the industry’s structure, and the social contract between tourism and society.
- Tourist role evolution: passive consumer → co-creator → content producer → agent of change. Each stage carries different responsibilities and power dynamics.
- Destination reconception: from product to be marketed → living ecosystem of communities, cultures, and environments requiring balanced governance.
- Boundary dissolution: digital nomadism, bleisure, slow travel, and virtual tourism blur the distinctions between tourist and resident, work and leisure, visit and habitation.
- Politicisation: overtourism has transformed tourism from a broadly welcomed economic activity into a contested political issue in cities including Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, and Dubrovnik.
- Structural shift: linear value chain (agent → operator → airline → hotel) replaced by platform ecosystem (OTAs, Airbnb, social media) and now evolving toward AI-mediated travel discovery.
- The growth consensus has fractured: multiple competing visions (value-over-volume, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, equity) are contesting the purpose of tourism.
- Venice’s 2024 day-tripper entry fee is a symbolic milestone: the first time a major destination asserted that visitor access is conditional, not unconditional.
- For managers: addressing changes requires strategic reorientation (value-driven metrics), governance participation (community partnership), and ethical leadership (navigating contested purpose with honesty).
- The fundamental question has shifted from “how do we grow?” to “what is tourism for, and whom should it serve?” – a question that requires ethical judgement, not just commercial competence.

Case Study – Lisbon: A City Confronting the Full Spectrum of Changes in the Nature of Tourism

Background

Lisbon, Portugal’s capital city of approximately 550,000 residents in the metropolitan core, has experienced one of the most dramatic tourism transformations of any European city in the past decade. International visitor numbers to Lisbon grew from approximately 2.5 million in 2010 to over 7

million by 2019, driven by low-cost airline route expansion (Ryanair, easyJet, TAP), social media visibility, favourable price positioning relative to Western European competitors, the global popularity of Portuguese gastronomy and wine, a vibrant cultural and creative scene, and the city's emergence as one of Europe's leading digital nomad destinations. Lisbon's tourism growth has been widely celebrated as an economic success story – the city was named Europe's Leading City Destination at the World Travel Awards multiple times – but it has simultaneously generated social, political, and cultural consequences that illustrate every dimension of the changes in the nature of tourism examined in this section.

The Housing Crisis and Politicisation of Tourism

Lisbon's most acute tourism-related challenge has been the housing crisis. The proliferation of short-term rental apartments – Lisbon had an estimated 20,000 active Airbnb listings by 2019, one of the highest densities in Europe – combined with the arrival of digital nomads and remote workers earning Northern European salaries has driven rents and property prices beyond the reach of local residents. Historic neighbourhoods including Alfama, Mouraria, Graça, and Bairro Alto have experienced significant depopulation as long-term residents are displaced by tourism-related rent increases, apartment conversions, and the transformation of neighbourhood-serving businesses into tourist-oriented enterprises. Resident anger has been intense and politically consequential: protest movements, anti-tourism graffiti, and political campaigns demanding short-term rental restrictions have made tourism one of the most contested political issues in Lisbon's municipal politics. The Portuguese government introduced regulations including restrictions on new short-term rental licences in saturated areas and a controversial proposal (later modified) to end the Non-Habitual Resident tax regime that had attracted wealthy foreigners to Lisbon.

The Digital Nomad Phenomenon

Lisbon became one of the world's most popular digital nomad destinations, attracting remote workers from across Europe, North America, and beyond. Co-working spaces proliferated; cafes marketed themselves as laptop-friendly workspaces; and entire neighbourhoods developed ecosystems of co-working, co-living, and nomad-friendly accommodation. Portugal introduced a digital nomad visa (D8 visa) in 2022 to formalise and capitalise on this market segment. The digital nomad influx brought economic benefit – high-spending consumers who stay for weeks or months rather than days – but also intensified the housing affordability crisis, created cultural friction between transient international populations and established Portuguese communities, and raised questions about the dissolution of tourist-resident boundaries: digital nomads are neither tourists nor immigrants in the traditional sense, and their impact on the city's housing, culture, and social fabric is qualitatively different from either.

Platform Dominance and AI Mediation

Lisbon's tourism economy is heavily mediated by digital platforms. Booking.com and Airbnb dominate accommodation distribution, extracting commissions that reduce the revenue retained by local operators. TripAdvisor and Google influence which restaurants, experiences, and attractions receive visibility and demand. Social media platforms – particularly Instagram and TikTok – have shaped Lisbon's international image, amplifying certain neighbourhoods, viewpoints, and experiences while leaving others invisible. The emergence of AI-powered travel planning adds another layer of mediation: generative AI systems that recommend “what to do in Lisbon” are beginning to shape visitor behaviour in ways that neither the city government nor local businesses can control, raising questions about who governs the cultural narrative of the destination when algorithmic recommendations replace human guidebook authorship and local knowledge.

Cultural Identity Under Pressure

Lisbon's cultural identity – the melancholic beauty of fado music, the working-class neighbourhoods of Alfama and Mouraria, the traditional tascas (taverns) serving bacalhau and vinho tinto, the human-

scale architecture of pastel-coloured buildings clinging to steep hills – is the foundation of its tourism appeal. Yet that cultural identity is under pressure from the very tourism it attracts. Traditional tascas close as rents rise and are replaced by international brunch restaurants. Fado performances are commodified into tourist dinner shows that bear diminishing resemblance to the intimate, spontaneous art form practised in genuine fado houses. Residential communities whose daily life gives neighbourhoods their character are displaced by transient tourist and nomad populations. The cultural paradox is that tourism is consuming the authenticity it came to experience – and that the further tourism transforms the city, the less the city offers the authentic character that generated the tourism demand in the first place.

Discussion Questions

1. Using Table 1 from this section, map every structural change in the nature of tourism that is visible in Lisbon's case. Which change is most consequential for the city's future, and why?
2. Lisbon's cultural paradox – tourism consuming the authenticity it came to experience – mirrors the self-destructive cycle identified in the Dubrovnik case from an earlier module. Is this cycle inevitable in popular urban destinations, or can governance intervention prevent it? What evidence supports your position?
3. The digital nomad phenomenon in Lisbon creates economic benefit (high spending, long stays) alongside social cost (housing inflation, community displacement, cultural friction). Using the competing visions for tourism's purpose discussed in this section, evaluate whether the digital nomad market should be encouraged, managed, or restricted. What governance tools are available?
4. Compare Amsterdam's strategic response (from the Industry Insight) with Lisbon's situation. What lessons from Amsterdam's approach could Lisbon adopt, and what contextual differences might limit their transferability?
5. If you were advising the Lisbon municipal government on a tourism strategy that addresses the changes in the nature of tourism, which of the five competing visions (value-over-volume, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, equity) would you recommend as the guiding framework, and what specific policies would you propose for housing, platform regulation, cultural preservation, and visitor management?

2.2 Identify the issues experienced as a result of the changes

Introduction

The previous section examined how the fundamental nature of tourism is changing: the tourist's role shifting from consumer to co-creator and content producer, the concept of destination evolving from product to living ecosystem, the industry restructuring from linear value chain to platform and AI-mediated ecosystem, and the social contract fracturing from growth consensus to contested purpose. Each of these structural changes generates specific issues – cultural tensions, social problems, economic distortions, environmental pressures, and governance challenges – that destinations, host communities, and hospitality organisations must confront.

This section identifies and analyses these issues systematically, organised into six thematic categories: the housing and displacement crisis, cultural erosion and the authenticity paradox, the labour and decent work challenge, the algorithmic power problem, the environmental accountability gap, and the governance deficit. At the MBA level, identifying these issues requires more than listing problems; it demands understanding the causal relationship between the structural changes and the issues they produce, assessing who is most affected and why, and evaluating the adequacy of current responses.

1. The Housing and Displacement Crisis

The change that drives it. The platform revolution – specifically the rise of Airbnb and similar short-term rental platforms – combined with the digital nomad phenomenon and the broader financialisation of residential property, has created acute housing crises in tourism-intensive cities worldwide. The structural change is the conversion of residential housing stock into visitor accommodation on a scale and at a speed that the traditional hotel development process never produced.

The issue. Short-term rental platforms enable any property owner to convert a residential apartment into a tourist accommodation with minimal regulation, no planning permission, and no contribution to the infrastructure costs that hotel development would require. When this conversion occurs at scale – as it has in Lisbon, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Florence, Berlin, and dozens of other popular urban destinations – it removes housing from the long-term rental market, drives up rents for remaining residential properties, displaces long-term residents who cannot compete with the rental income that tourist accommodation generates, transforms residential neighbourhoods into transient zones lacking the social fabric of permanent community, and generates noise, waste, and antisocial behaviour that degrades quality of life for remaining residents. The digital nomad phenomenon compounds the effect: remote workers earning high-income-country salaries but living in lower-cost destinations drive up local prices for housing, food, and services, creating what economists call geographic arbitrage but what host communities experience as economic displacement.

Who is most affected. The housing and displacement crisis falls disproportionately on the most economically vulnerable residents: renters rather than property owners (who benefit from rising values), lower-income workers, the elderly, families with children, and communities with limited political voice. The distributional injustice is particularly acute: the people who bear the greatest cost of tourism-driven displacement are those who benefit least from the tourism economy, while the property owners and platform companies who profit most from the conversion are often external to the community – investors from other cities or countries who purchased properties specifically for short-term rental income.

Current responses and their adequacy. Regulatory responses have been introduced in many affected cities: Amsterdam limits short-term rentals to 30 nights per year, Barcelona has banned new tourist apartment licences in the city centre, Berlin requires registration and restricts entire-apartment letting, and several cities have imposed tourist taxes on short-term rental stays equivalent to hotel taxes. However, enforcement is challenging, platform companies have resisted regulation, and the scale of the housing crisis in many cities has outpaced regulatory response. The fundamental issue is structural: the platform business model incentivises the conversion of residential housing into tourist accommodation because it is more profitable for individual property owners, and no regulatory framework has yet succeeded in fully reversing this incentive while preserving the legitimate short-term rental market that serves both hosts and guests.

2. Cultural Erosion and the Authenticity Paradox

The change that drives it. The shift from the tourist as passive consumer to the tourist as experience-seeking co-creator and content producer, combined with the social media amplification of demand for “authentic” cultural encounters, creates a paradox: the more intensely tourists seek authenticity, the more the economic incentives of tourism transform authentic cultural expressions into performed commodities, destroying the very authenticity being sought.

The issue. Cultural erosion through tourism manifests in multiple interconnected ways. The commodification of sacred and traditional practices transforms living cultural expressions into scheduled performances for paying audiences, separating them from their cultural meaning, social context, and spiritual significance. The displacement of community-serving businesses by tourist-serving enterprises transforms neighbourhood character: a bakery that served local families for three generations becomes a souvenir shop; a neighbourhood bar where residents gathered becomes a tourist cocktail lounge; a traditional market selling food to locals becomes a curated “food market experience” selling artisanal products at visitor prices. The homogenisation of commercial landscapes creates what critics call “touristification” – a process in which diverse, locally distinctive commercial environments are replaced by a standardised palette of souvenir shops, international restaurant chains, and tourist-oriented services that are functionally identical regardless of destination. And the social media imperative to produce shareable content incentivises cultural encounters that are photogenic and brief rather than meaningful and deep, potentially reducing complex cultural traditions to Instagram-ready spectacles.

The authenticity paradox in depth. The sociologist Dean MacCannell argued that tourists seek authentic experiences as an antidote to the perceived inauthenticity of modern life, but that the tourism industry’s response to this demand is to create “staged authenticity” – experiences designed to appear authentic while being carefully manufactured for commercial purposes. The paradox is that genuinely authentic cultural encounters are, by definition, not designed for tourists: they exist in the private, community-oriented spaces of daily life that tourism disrupts by entering them. When a traditional fishing village becomes a tourism destination, the fishing activity that attracted visitors as an “authentic” spectacle may cease to be economically rational (tourism income exceeds fishing income), the village’s character transforms to serve visitors rather than fishers, and what remains is a performed version of the fishing village that preserves the visual aesthetic while emptying it of the social reality that made it culturally significant. The issue is not that tourism destroys culture in a single dramatic act but that it gradually transforms culture into a resource for commercial extraction, hollowing out its meaning while preserving its appearance.

3. The Labour and Decent Work Challenge

The change that drives it. The platform revolution, the gig economy model, the fragmentation of the tourism value chain, and the post-pandemic restructuring of the hospitality workforce have created a labour environment characterised by intensifying precarity alongside growing demand for higher-skilled, culturally literate service delivery.

The issue. The hospitality and tourism sector's labour challenges constitute a multi-dimensional issue. Post-pandemic labour shortages affect destinations worldwide: workers who left the industry during COVID-19 lockdowns have not returned in sufficient numbers, drawn to other sectors that offer better pay, more predictable hours, and greater dignity. Wages remain persistently low relative to other sectors, particularly in destination-facing roles that require the cultural knowledge, emotional labour, and personal engagement that contemporary travellers value most. The gig economy model – exemplified by platform-mediated tour guiding, freelance experience hosting, and zero-hours hospitality contracts – shifts financial risk from employers to workers, eliminates benefits and social protection, and creates a workforce that is simultaneously more flexible and more vulnerable. The demand for culturally literate, personally engaging service (the experience economy, authenticity, and transformative travel trends) requires investment in recruitment, training, and retention that conflicts with the industry's historical cost-minimisation approach to labour. And the intersection of tourism with migration creates specific vulnerabilities: migrant workers in hospitality often face exploitation, discrimination, language barriers, insecure immigration status, and limited access to labour protections.

The capability dimension. Applying the capability approach from the development theory studied earlier in this programme, tourism employment that constrains workers' freedoms – through poverty wages, unpredictable schedules that prevent family life, lack of training that limits career progression, and precarious contracts that generate constant anxiety – is not merely a labour market problem but a development failure. The hospitality industry's capacity to deliver the culturally rich, personally meaningful experiences that contemporary travellers demand depends entirely on the quality, motivation, and cultural confidence of its workforce. An industry that treats its workers as a cost to be minimised cannot simultaneously deliver the human encounters that its guests most value. The labour issue is therefore not peripheral to the cultural and societal changes in tourism but central to them: addressing the changes requires a workforce that is empowered, educated, and respected, and creating that workforce requires a fundamental shift in how the industry values and invests in its people.

4. The Algorithmic Power Problem

The change that drives it. The structural shift from human-mediated to algorithmically mediated tourism – the replacement of travel agents, guidebook authors, and local concierges by platform algorithms and generative AI systems – concentrates extraordinary power in the technology companies and AI systems that mediate between travellers and destinations.

The issue. The algorithmic power problem operates at multiple levels. Visibility and ranking: which hotels, restaurants, experiences, and destinations appear in search results, platform rankings, and AI-generated recommendations is determined by algorithms whose criteria are proprietary, opaque, and optimised for the platform's commercial objectives rather than for the quality of the traveller's experience or the wellbeing of the host community. Small, locally owned operators who cannot invest in search engine optimisation, review management, or advertising

within platform ecosystems are systematically disadvantaged relative to larger, better-resourced competitors. Commission extraction: dominant platforms charge commissions of 15 to 25 per cent on each booking, reducing the revenue that local operators retain and creating a new form of economic leakage that transfers value from destination communities to platform shareholders in Silicon Valley, Amsterdam, or Singapore. Data asymmetry: platforms possess vast datasets on traveller behaviour, preferences, and willingness to pay that local operators do not have access to, creating an information advantage that platforms can exploit through dynamic pricing, targeted advertising, and market intelligence that is unavailable to the businesses that supply the actual product. And cultural homogenisation: algorithmic recommendation systems tend to amplify popularity – recommending what is already popular to new users – creating self-reinforcing demand concentration that directs visitors toward the same restaurants, attractions, and experiences while rendering lesser-known alternatives invisible, regardless of their quality or cultural significance.

The AI escalation. Generative AI intensifies the algorithmic power problem by collapsing the entire discovery-planning-booking journey into a single AI-mediated interaction. When a traveller asks an AI assistant to plan their trip, the AI decides which destinations to recommend, which properties to suggest, which experiences to include, and which to omit – decisions previously distributed across multiple human and institutional actors (travel agents, guidebook publishers, DMOs, review platforms) but now concentrated in AI systems whose training data, commercial relationships, and recommendation logic are opaque. The cultural consequence is that the narrative of a destination – what visitors are told it is, what they are encouraged to experience, and how they are invited to engage with it – is increasingly authored by algorithms rather than by the communities, cultural practitioners, and human experts who understand the destination's genuine character. This represents a fundamental issue in the cultural and societal dimensions of tourism: the mediation of cultural encounter by technological systems that have no cultural understanding.

5. The Environmental Accountability Gap

The change that drives it. The conscious travel trend has elevated environmental expectations among travellers, but the structural changes in tourism – platform-mediated growth, AI-driven demand amplification, and the dissolution of boundaries between tourism and other forms of mobility – have made the aggregate environmental impact of tourism harder to measure, attribute, and govern.

The issue. An accountability gap exists between the environmental expectations that travellers and societies increasingly hold for tourism and the actual environmental performance of the tourism system. At the macro level, tourism's carbon footprint continues to grow despite efficiency improvements, because the number of trips and the distances travelled are increasing faster than emissions per trip are declining. At the industry level, sustainability claims proliferate through marketing but are inconsistently substantiated: the fewer-than-4-per-cent certification rate documented by the Centre for Responsible Travel indicates that the vast majority of tourism businesses operate without any verified sustainability standards. At the destination level, the environmental costs of tourism – water consumption, waste generation, biodiversity loss, coastal degradation – are borne by host communities and ecosystems while the environmental information that travellers receive is curated by operators and platforms with commercial incentives to minimise the visibility of these costs. The accountability gap is compounded by the platform economy: platforms profit from facilitating bookings but bear no responsibility for the environmental impact of the travel they enable, creating a structural disconnect between the

entities that shape demand and the communities and environments that absorb its consequences.

The greenwashing escalation. The conscious travel trend has paradoxically intensified the greenwashing problem. As travellers express greater concern for sustainability, the commercial incentive to appear sustainable grows – regardless of whether genuine operational change accompanies the marketing claims. The proliferation of vague sustainability labels, unverified carbon offset programmes, and aspirational net-zero pledges without credible transition plans creates a landscape in which consumers cannot distinguish genuine sustainability from performative signalling. The European Union’s Green Claims Directive, which will require businesses to substantiate environmental claims with verified evidence, represents the most significant regulatory response to date, but its implementation and enforcement across the fragmented global tourism industry remains a substantial challenge. For destinations, the issue is that greenwashing by individual operators undermines the credibility of the entire destination’s sustainability positioning, making it harder for genuinely committed businesses to differentiate themselves and easier for guests to become cynical about all sustainability claims.

6. The Governance Deficit

The change that drives it. The structural changes in tourism – platform disruption, AI mediation, dissolving boundaries, and the politicisation of place – have collectively outpaced the governance frameworks that were designed for an era of linear value chains, fixed destination boundaries, and uncontested growth.

The issue. The governance deficit manifests in several interconnected dimensions. Jurisdictional mismatch: the platforms that most profoundly affect local tourism outcomes – Airbnb, Booking.com, Google, TikTok – are global technology companies that operate across jurisdictions, making them difficult for any single municipal or national government to regulate effectively. Local governments that impose restrictions on short-term rentals face platform business models that are designed to circumvent regulation, and the enforcement resources of a municipal government are vastly outmatched by the legal and technical resources of a multinational technology company. Democratic deficit: decisions that fundamentally affect the character, economy, and liveability of tourism destinations are increasingly made by algorithm designers, platform executives, and AI systems rather than by elected representatives, community organisations, or the residents who experience the consequences. The TikTok video that sends 50,000 visitors to a previously quiet village, the Airbnb algorithm that makes one neighbourhood more visible than another, and the AI travel planner that recommends one restaurant over another all shape destination outcomes without any democratic input from the affected community. Speed mismatch: the pace of technological change and platform-driven market disruption vastly exceeds the pace of regulatory and governance response, creating a permanent lag in which governance frameworks are always addressing yesterday’s problems while new challenges emerge from technologies and business models that did not exist when the frameworks were designed.

The need for new governance models. Addressing the governance deficit requires innovation in governance itself – not merely the application of existing frameworks to new problems. Emerging approaches include: data-driven governance that uses real-time visitor flow data, platform transaction data, and environmental monitoring to inform dynamic management decisions; participatory governance that gives residents genuine decision-making power over tourism development in their communities rather than merely consulting them; platform accountability frameworks that require technology companies to share data with regulators,

contribute to the infrastructure costs their platforms generate, and accept responsibility for the impacts their business models create; and multi-stakeholder governance that brings together government, industry, community, and environmental representatives in structures designed to negotiate the competing interests that the fracturing of the growth consensus has exposed. These models are in their infancy, and no destination has yet achieved a governance framework fully adequate to the challenges that the structural changes in tourism have created.

Table 1. Issues Arising from Changes in the Nature of Tourism

Issue	Driving Change	Primary Victims	Core Tension	Governance Challenge
Housing and displacement	Platform revolution; digital nomadism; property financialisation	Low-income renters; elderly; families; marginalised communities	Property owner income vs community housing access	Enforcing rental restrictions against global platforms
Cultural erosion and authenticity paradox	Experience economy; social media; commodification of culture	Cultural practitioners; traditional communities; neighbourhood identity	Tourist demand for authenticity vs commercial incentive to stage it	Protecting living culture while enabling cultural tourism
Labour and decent work	Platform gig economy; post-pandemic restructuring; cost-minimisation culture	Seasonal workers; migrants; women in hospitality; youth	Industry need for cultural talent vs historical cost-minimisation model	Setting and enforcing decent work standards across fragmented sector
Algorithmic power	Platform dominance; AI mediation; data asymmetry	Small local operators; emerging destinations; culturally significant but unpopular sites	Platform commercial optimisation vs destination cultural narrative	Regulating opaque algorithmic systems across jurisdictions
Environmental accountability gap	Growth outpacing efficiency; greenwashing; platform-enabled demand	Host communities; fragile ecosystems; future generations	Sustainability marketing vs actual environmental performance	Verifying claims; attributing impact; enforcing accountability
Governance deficit	Speed of technological change; platform global reach; dissolving boundaries	Residents; democratic institutions; local government capacity	Pace of disruption vs pace of regulatory response	Building new governance models for platform-era tourism

The Interconnectedness of Issues

These six issues do not exist independently; they form an interconnected system in which each issue amplifies the others. The platform revolution drives the housing crisis, which drives community displacement, which erodes the cultural authenticity that tourists seek, which intensifies the demand for commodified cultural performances, which generates the superficial encounters that social media amplifies, which attracts more visitors to already-pressured destinations, which deepens the housing crisis further. The algorithmic power of platforms concentrates demand in visible destinations while rendering less-visited alternatives invisible, intensifying both overtourism in popular locations and undertourism elsewhere. The governance deficit allows all of these dynamics to operate with minimal democratic accountability, while the environmental accountability gap ensures that the ecological costs of the entire system accumulate without adequate measurement or management.

For the MBA student, recognising this interconnectedness is analytically essential. Interventions that address a single issue in isolation – restricting short-term rentals without addressing platform power, or promoting cultural preservation without addressing the economic incentives that drive commodification – will produce limited results because the systemic dynamics that generate the issue remain intact. Effective responses must address the structural causes, not merely the visible symptoms, and must recognise that the issues are produced by the same set of changes in the nature of tourism that also create the opportunities examined in earlier sections of this module. The challenge is not to eliminate the changes but to govern them: to capture the benefits of platform-enabled connectivity, AI-powered personalisation, and the democratisation of travel while managing the housing crises, cultural erosion, labour exploitation, algorithmic concentration, environmental damage, and governance failures that unmanaged change produces.

Need to Know –

Identifying issues arising from changes in tourism at the MBA level requires more than listing problems. Assessors expect you to: trace the causal relationship between specific structural changes and the issues they produce (not merely describe the issue but explain what drives it); assess the distributional dimension (who is most affected and why); evaluate the adequacy of current responses (regulation, industry self-regulation, community action); recognise the interconnectedness of issues (how housing, culture, labour, algorithmic power, environment, and governance challenges reinforce one another); and distinguish between issues that can be managed within existing governance frameworks and those that require fundamentally new approaches. The strongest work connects this section's issue identification back to the structural changes from the previous section and forward to the strategic, governance, and ethical responses that the module's final assessment will require.

Did you know...?

Research by the European Commission estimated that short-term rental platforms were responsible for removing between 8 and 13 per cent of the residential housing stock from the long-term rental market in the most tourism-intensive neighbourhoods of European cities including Barcelona, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Florence, and Prague. In some micro-neighbourhoods – such as Barcelona's Gothic Quarter, Venice's San Marco, and Lisbon's Alfama – the proportion of properties listed on short-term rental platforms exceeded 25 per cent of total housing units, creating residential

displacement at a scale that transformed these historic neighbourhoods from living communities into what urban scholars have described as “tourist districts with residual inhabitants.” This data makes visible the link between the platform revolution and the housing crisis that this section examines, and demonstrates why regulatory responses that target individual property owners without addressing the platform business model that incentivises the conversion are unlikely to resolve the structural problem.

Industry Insight – The Compounding Issues of Tourism Change in Kyoto: Cultural Erosion, Algorithmic Amplification, and Governance Innovation

Kyoto, Japan’s former imperial capital and one of the world’s most culturally significant cities, provides an exceptionally vivid case study of how the issues arising from changes in the nature of tourism interact and compound within a single destination. With 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, over 2,000 temples and shrines, a living tradition of geisha arts, a refined culinary culture, and an architectural heritage spanning centuries, Kyoto attracts over 50 million visitors annually – more than ten times its resident population of approximately 1.4 million.

Cultural erosion and the geisha crisis. The Gion geisha district illustrates the authenticity paradox at its most acute. Geisha and maiko (apprentice geisha) are living practitioners of a centuries-old artistic tradition encompassing music, dance, conversation, and ceremonial arts. Their presence in Gion’s narrow streets as they walk between engagements has become one of Kyoto’s most iconic images – and one of its most intense tourism pressure points. Visitors, particularly those seeking social media content, have pursued geisha through the streets, blocked their paths for photographs, touched their clothing and hair, entered private properties, and disrupted the training and professional activities that sustain the tradition. The intrusion became so severe that the Gion district introduced photography bans in private alleys in 2019, with fines of 10,000 yen for violations. The issue illustrates the cultural erosion dynamic precisely: the tourism demand for authentic encounter with a living tradition generates behaviour that threatens the tradition’s survival, because genuine cultural practice cannot be maintained under conditions of constant public spectacle and personal harassment.

Algorithmic amplification. Social media and algorithmic recommendation systems have amplified visitor pressure at Kyoto’s most photogenic sites beyond any level that pre-digital destination management anticipated. The Fushimi Inari Shrine’s vermillion torii gate pathway, the Arashiyama bamboo grove, and the Kinkaku-ji golden pavilion have become globally viral images, driving demand concentrations that overwhelm the sites’ physical and experiential capacity. TikTok and Instagram content featuring these locations reaches millions of potential visitors in hours, creating demand surges that cannot be managed through traditional visitor management tools designed for gradual, predictable growth. The algorithmic power problem is acute: the platforms that amplify demand bear no responsibility for managing its consequences at the destination, and the visibility algorithms that drive visitors to already-popular sites simultaneously render Kyoto’s thousands of less-visited temples, gardens, and cultural sites invisible to the very travellers who might relieve pressure on the congested attractions if they knew about them.

The housing and neighbourhood transformation issue. Although Kyoto’s housing crisis is less severe than in some European cities, the conversion of traditional machiya townhouses into tourist accommodation has transformed neighbourhood character in central districts. Machiya – wooden townhouses representing centuries of architectural tradition – have been purchased by investors and converted into boutique guesthouses, private rental villas, and tourist-oriented retail spaces. While this has preserved some machiya that might otherwise have been demolished, it has also removed residential properties from the community, replacing long-term neighbours with transient guests and

transforming the social fabric of streets that were previously defined by the daily rhythms of permanent residents. The issue reflects the broader tension between heritage preservation (the machiya survive as buildings) and community preservation (the social life they housed does not).

Governance innovation. Kyoto's governance response to these compounding issues represents one of the most comprehensive attempts by any city to manage the issues arising from changes in tourism's nature. The city government has introduced: a lodging tax (applied to all accommodation types including short-term rentals) that generates revenue earmarked for cultural preservation and visitor management; strict regulation of short-term rental properties including mandatory licensing, resident notification requirements, and operating restrictions; a tourism manners campaign educating visitors about cultural protocols, noise, and photography etiquette; investment in a real-time visitor management system that monitors congestion at major sites and redirects visitors through digital signage and app-based recommendations; the promotion of lesser-visited areas through the "another Kyoto" campaign that encourages exploration of the city's northern, southern, and western districts; and engagement with platform companies to share data and coordinate demand management. The city has also explored the use of dynamic pricing at major sites and time-slot reservation systems to distribute visitor pressure more evenly across the day and week.

Kyoto's case demonstrates that the issues identified in this section are not abstract: they are experienced daily by cultural practitioners whose traditions are threatened, by residents whose neighbourhoods are transformed, and by governance institutions struggling to manage consequences that exceed their design capacity. The city's response illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of destination-level governance in the face of globally driven structural change. For MBA students, Kyoto provides a benchmark case for understanding how issues interact, compound, and resist resolution through single-dimension interventions.

Over to You – Activity

This activity requires you to analyse a specific issue arising from changes in the nature of tourism, supported by academic evidence.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines one of the six issues discussed in this section (housing and displacement, cultural erosion, labour and decent work, algorithmic power, environmental accountability, or governance deficit) as it manifests in a specific destination or organisational context.

Suggested search terms: "Airbnb housing displacement tourism" • "tourism cultural commodification authenticity" • "hospitality decent work labour crisis" • "platform economy tourism power" • "tourism greenwashing sustainability gap" • "tourism governance platform regulation" • "social media overtourism algorithmic" • "digital nomad displacement gentrification"

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the specific issue and the destination or organisational context. Trace the causal relationship between the structural change in tourism that drives the issue and the specific manifestation examined in the article. Assess the distributional dimension: who is most affected and who benefits from the change that creates the issue? Evaluate the adequacy of any governance or management responses described. Consider how the issue connects to at least one other issue from this section (they are interconnected). Conclude with a reflection on whether the issue can be managed within existing governance frameworks or whether fundamentally new approaches are required, and what those new approaches might involve.

Revision on the Go

- Six issues arising from changes in tourism: housing and displacement, cultural erosion and the authenticity paradox, labour and decent work, algorithmic power, environmental accountability gap, and governance deficit.
- Housing: short-term rental platforms remove 8–13% of housing stock in tourism-intensive European neighbourhoods; some micro-neighbourhoods exceed 25% conversion.
- Cultural erosion: the authenticity paradox (MacCannell) – the more tourists seek authenticity, the more commercial incentives produce staged versions of it, hollowing out meaning while preserving appearance.
- Labour: post-pandemic shortages, persistent low wages, gig economy precarity, and the contradiction between demanding culturally rich service while minimising labour costs.
- Algorithmic power: platforms control visibility, extract 15–25% commissions, amplify demand concentration, and create data asymmetries. AI intensifies this by collapsing discovery into opaque algorithmic decisions.
- Environmental gap: sustainability marketing proliferates but fewer than 4% of businesses are certified; growth outpaces efficiency; platforms profit from bookings without bearing environmental responsibility.
- Governance deficit: jurisdictional mismatch (global platforms vs local regulation), democratic deficit (algorithmic decisions without community input), and speed mismatch (disruption faster than regulatory response).
- Issues are interconnected, not independent: platforms drive housing crisis → displacement erodes culture → commodification fills the gap → social media amplifies demand → further concentration → governance overwhelmed.
- Single-issue interventions produce limited results because systemic dynamics remain intact; effective responses address structural causes, not visible symptoms.
- The challenge is not to reverse the changes but to govern them: capture the benefits of platform connectivity, AI personalisation, and democratised travel while managing the crises that unmanaged change produces.

Case Study – The Compounding Issues of Tourism Change in Dubrovnik: From War Recovery to Cruise Ship Crisis

Background

Dubrovnik, the UNESCO World Heritage-listed walled city on Croatia's Adriatic coast, was examined in an earlier module as an example of tourism's destination impacts. This case study revisits Dubrovnik through the specific lens of this section: identifying the issues that have arisen from the structural changes in the nature of tourism and assessing their interconnectedness.

Dubrovnik's tourism recovery following the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s was initially celebrated as an economic triumph. International visitor numbers grew from near zero during the conflict to over 1.2 million annually by the late 2010s, in a city with a permanent population that had already declined to approximately 42,000. Tourism revenue rebuilt the local economy and funded the restoration of war-damaged heritage. But the changes in the nature of tourism examined in this module have generated a set of compounding issues that now threaten the long-term viability of both the tourism economy and the community it is supposed to serve.

Issue Identification

Housing and displacement: The Old Town's permanent population has declined from approximately 5,000 in 1991 to fewer than 1,000 as apartments have been converted to short-term tourist rentals and rents have risen beyond local affordability. The walled city has effectively been depopulated by its own tourism success.

Cultural erosion: The living Mediterranean community that once defined the Old Town – laundry strung between buildings, children in squares, neighbours in doorways – has been replaced by a commercial landscape of souvenir shops, tourist restaurants, and vacation rental agencies. The cultural character that originally attracted visitors has been consumed by the tourism it generated. Game of Thrones screen tourism added a layer of fictional cultural overlay that competes with the city's genuine thousand-year history for visitor attention.

Labour: Tourism employment in Dubrovnik is heavily seasonal, with many businesses operating only during the May-to-October visitor season. Workers face insecure contracts, long hours during peak season, and unemployment or underemployment during winter. The high cost of living driven by tourism makes it difficult for hospitality workers to afford accommodation in the city they serve, creating a workforce that commutes from cheaper satellite communities.

Algorithmic amplification: Social media and platform-driven visibility have concentrated demand on a handful of photogenic locations within the compact walled city. Cruise ship excursions, mediated by cruise line itinerary algorithms that prioritise Dubrovnik as a high-demand port of call, discharge thousands of day visitors into the Old Town for periods of three to four hours, creating surge congestion that overwhelms the streets, degrades the experience for all visitors, and generates minimal economic benefit relative to overnight guests (cruise passengers spend an estimated 85 per cent less per visitor than overnight tourists).

Environmental pressure: Pedestrian congestion in medieval streets designed for a small residential population places physical stress on historic surfaces. Cruise ship emissions affect air quality and the marine environment. Water, waste, and sanitation infrastructure designed for 42,000 residents must accommodate peak-season populations that can exceed ten times that number. And the aggregate environmental impact of the aviation and cruise transport that delivers visitors to Dubrovnik is unaccounted for in any local sustainability assessment.

Governance challenges: The city government has introduced cruise ship passenger limits (capping simultaneous cruise visitors at 4,000), CCTV visitor counting at Old Town gates, short-term rental regulation, and a tourist tax. But the city's economic dependence on tourism creates a political dilemma: meaningful restrictions on visitor numbers threaten the livelihoods of the majority of residents, while failing to restrict them threatens the heritage, environment, and community viability that make the city worth visiting. The governance deficit is compounded by the national government's tourism growth agenda, which does not always align with the city's capacity management priorities.

Discussion Questions

1. Map the six issues from this section onto Dubrovnik's situation. Draw the interconnections between them: how does each issue amplify the others? Identify the most consequential feedback loop.
2. The cruise ship model in Dubrovnik exemplifies the algorithmic power problem: cruise line algorithms select Dubrovnik as a port of call, discharging thousands of passengers who overwhelm the city while generating minimal local economic benefit. What governance tools are available to the city to manage this specific issue, and what structural barriers limit their effectiveness?
3. Dubrovnik's Old Town depopulation (from 5,000 to fewer than 1,000 residents) represents an irreversible cultural loss: the community that gave the city its character cannot be reconstituted once dispersed. Using the authenticity paradox framework, assess whether Dubrovnik can remain a culturally meaningful tourism destination without a resident community, or whether the depopulation has destroyed the cultural asset that tourism depended upon.

4. Compare Dubrovnik's governance response with Kyoto's (from the Industry Insight). Which city's approach is more likely to succeed in managing the compounding issues, and why? What can each learn from the other?
5. If you were advising the Dubrovnik city government, would you recommend pursuing a degrowth strategy (deliberately reducing visitor numbers), a value-over-volume strategy (replacing low-spending cruise passengers with high-spending overnight guests), or a regenerative strategy (using tourism revenue to restore the resident community and cultural life)? Justify your recommendation with reference to the issues and interconnections identified in your analysis.

2.3 Show critical knowledge on the impact towards the culture and society

Introduction

This section represents the analytical capstone of the Culture and Society in Tourism module. Where previous sections identified trends, analysed them in organisational context, addressed the structural changes in tourism's nature, and identified the issues those changes produce, this section requires a deeper engagement: demonstrating critical knowledge of how tourism impacts culture and society. "Critical knowledge" is the operative phrase. It means more than knowing what the impacts are; it means understanding why they occur, whose interests they serve, how they are theorised in the academic literature, where the evidence is strong and where it is contested, and what the implications are for how tourism should be governed, managed, and ethically practised.

This section is structured around five theoretical frameworks that provide the analytical tools for critical engagement with tourism's cultural and societal impacts: the sociology of the tourist gaze, the political economy of cultural commodification, the social exchange framework, the concept of cultural carrying capacity and the right to place, and the emerging framework of cultural justice in tourism. Each framework is explained, applied to contemporary tourism contexts, and critically evaluated for its usefulness in understanding and addressing the impacts identified throughout this module.

1. The Tourist Gaze: Power, Representation, and the Construction of the "Other"

The framework. John Urry's concept of the tourist gaze, first published in 1990 and subsequently developed with Jonas Larsen, is one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in the sociology of tourism. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of the gaze as an instrument of power, Urry argued that tourism is fundamentally about looking – about the ways in which tourists visually consume places, cultures, and people that are different from their everyday environment. The tourist gaze is not neutral observation; it is a culturally constructed way of seeing that is shaped by the social position, cultural background, and expectations of the tourist, by the representations produced by tourism marketing, media, and guidebooks, and by the power relationship between the gazer (typically a visitor from a wealthier society) and the gazed-upon (typically a host in a destination that has been packaged for visual consumption).

Application to contemporary impacts. The tourist gaze framework illuminates several of the cultural impacts examined throughout this module. Social media has democratised and intensified the gaze: every tourist with a smartphone is now both a gazer and a broadcaster of their gaze, sharing images of places, cultures, and people with global audiences. The pursuit of the "perfect shot" for Instagram transforms cultural sites, religious ceremonies, and human encounters into visual commodities to be captured rather than experienced, contributing to the cultural erosion identified in the previous section. The gaze is also embedded in the AI recommendation systems that mediate contemporary travel: the images, descriptions, and rankings that algorithms surface reflect and reinforce particular ways of seeing destinations that may exoticise, simplify, or misrepresent the cultural complexity of the places they depict. The Gion geisha district in Kyoto, where tourists pursue and photograph maiko as though they were visual exhibits rather than working artists, illustrates the gaze at its most intrusive: the cultural

practitioner becomes an object of consumption, and the act of looking becomes an act of appropriation.

Critical evaluation. The tourist gaze framework is powerful because it reveals the power dynamics embedded in tourism's visual culture and challenges the assumption that looking is a neutral, benign activity. However, it has been criticised for overemphasising the visual dimension of tourism at the expense of other sensory and embodied experiences (taste, touch, sound, smell, physical challenge, emotional connection), for presenting the tourist as a purely consuming subject without agency or self-awareness, and for underplaying the capacity of host communities to negotiate, resist, or strategically perform for the gaze in ways that serve their own interests. The framework's usefulness lies in its capacity to surface the power dynamics of tourism encounters; its limitation is that it can produce an overly deterministic account that leaves little room for the mutual exchange, genuine connection, and cultural enrichment that tourism can also facilitate.

2. The Political Economy of Cultural Commodification

The framework. The commodification framework, drawing on Marxist political economy and developed in tourism studies by scholars including Erik Cohen, Dean MacCannell, and Hazel Tucker, analyses the process by which cultural practices, artefacts, performances, and ways of life are transformed into products that can be bought, sold, and consumed in the tourism marketplace. Commodification occurs when culture – which in its organic form is practised for its own meaning and significance within a community – is repackaged as a product whose primary purpose is to satisfy tourist demand and generate commercial revenue. The transformation involves simplification (complex cultural practices are reduced to digestible tourist-friendly versions), decontextualisation (practices are removed from their cultural context and performed in commercial settings), standardisation (variable, spontaneous cultural expression is regularised into scheduled, repeatable performances), and commercialisation (the motivation for cultural practice shifts from internal meaning to external exchange value).

Application to contemporary impacts. The commodification framework explains many of the cultural impacts observed throughout this module. The transformation of neighbourhood-serving businesses into tourist-serving enterprises in cities from Lisbon to Dubrovnik is a form of commercial commodification: the daily commerce of a living community is replaced by a curated commercial landscape designed for visitor consumption. The adaptation of sacred ceremonies, traditional dances, and indigenous practices into scheduled tourist performances represents cultural commodification at its most sensitive: the practice survives in form but is emptied of the meaning that gave it cultural significance. The global proliferation of “authentic food experiences” – cooking classes, market tours, farm-to-table dining – can represent either genuine cultural exchange or the packaging of culinary tradition into a standardised commercial product, depending on who controls the encounter, who captures the economic value, and whether the experience connects the guest with the living food culture of the place or merely stages an appearance of connection.

The Cohen counter-argument. Erik Cohen has argued that commodification is not necessarily destructive. He distinguishes between emergent authenticity – the process by which cultural practices that were originally created for tourists can, over time, acquire genuine cultural meaning for the community that performs them – and the assumption that any commercial involvement automatically destroys cultural integrity. Cohen points to examples where tourism has revived cultural practices that were declining, has provided economic resources that fund cultural preservation, and has generated pride and renewed interest in traditions that younger

generations might otherwise have abandoned. The critical question, in Cohen's view, is not whether culture is commodified but on whose terms: when the community controls the process of cultural presentation, determines what is shared and what is kept private, and captures the economic value, commodification can coexist with cultural vitality. When external operators control the process and extract the value, commodification becomes cultural extraction.

3. The Social Exchange Framework: When Does the Bargain Break Down?

The framework. Social exchange theory, applied to tourism by researchers including John Ap, Kathleen Andereck, and others, analyses the host-visitor relationship as a transaction in which both parties exchange resources: the tourist receives experiences, relaxation, cultural enrichment, and social status; the host community receives economic benefit, cultural recognition, infrastructure investment, and cross-cultural contact. The theory predicts that host communities will support tourism as long as the perceived benefits of the exchange outweigh its perceived costs. When the balance tips – when residents perceive that they are bearing the costs of tourism (congestion, displacement, noise, cultural disruption, environmental degradation) without receiving proportionate benefits – support erodes and opposition emerges. This framework connects directly to Doxey's Irridex model (euphoria → apathy → irritation → antagonism) and to Butler's TALC, both of which describe the temporal evolution of the social exchange from positive to negative as tourism grows.

Application to contemporary impacts. The social exchange framework explains the politicisation of tourism documented throughout this module. In destinations where the exchange has broken down – where residents perceive that the costs of tourism exceed its benefits – the political consequences are predictable: protest movements, regulatory demands, and electoral pressure for tourism management rather than tourism promotion. Barcelona's anti-tourism protests, Amsterdam's removal of the I amsterdam letters, Venice's entry fee, and the community opposition to short-term rentals in cities worldwide all represent the political expression of a social exchange that residents perceive as unfair. The framework also explains differential attitudes within communities: residents who benefit directly from tourism (hotel owners, restaurant operators, guides) typically maintain positive perceptions even at high visitor volumes, while those who bear the costs without proportionate benefit (renters, public transport users, elderly residents, non-tourism workers) reach the irritation and antagonism stages earlier.

Critical evaluation. The social exchange framework is useful because it provides a rational, empirically testable explanation for why community attitudes toward tourism vary across time, place, and population segment. However, it has been criticised for assuming that the exchange is voluntary and that both parties have equal power to negotiate its terms – assumptions that are frequently violated in practice, particularly in developing-country destinations where communities may have no realistic option to reject tourism development. It also underplays the non-economic dimensions of the exchange: some impacts on culture, identity, and sense of place cannot be adequately assessed through a cost-benefit calculation because they involve values that are not commensurable with economic benefit. A community may receive substantial economic benefit from tourism while experiencing a loss of cultural identity and place attachment that no amount of income can compensate.

4. Cultural Carrying Capacity and the Right to Place

The framework. Cultural carrying capacity extends the ecological concept of carrying capacity into the socio-cultural domain. It refers to the level of tourism beyond which the cultural identity, social cohesion, and place character of a host community are unacceptably altered. Unlike ecological carrying capacity, which can be assessed through measurable indicators (species counts, water quality, waste volumes), cultural carrying capacity is inherently subjective: it depends on what the community considers “unacceptable alteration,” which varies across communities, cultural contexts, and political circumstances. The related concept of the right to place – the principle that residents have a right to maintain the character, liveability, and cultural identity of the places they inhabit – provides an ethical foundation for cultural carrying capacity by asserting that resident rights should be weighed against visitor access when the two conflict.

Application to contemporary impacts. The concept of cultural carrying capacity provides the theoretical language for the changes documented throughout this module. When Dubrovnik’s Old Town depopulates from 5,000 to fewer than 1,000 residents, its cultural carrying capacity has been exceeded: the living community that gave the city its character has been replaced by a commercial tourism landscape that preserves architectural form while destroying social substance. When Gion’s geisha practitioners can no longer walk to engagements without being photographed and pursued, the cultural carrying capacity of that district for the tourism it attracts has been exceeded: the cultural practice cannot survive under the conditions that tourism imposes. When a neighbourhood in Lisbon loses its bakery, its butcher, and its bar to souvenir shops and brunch restaurants, its cultural carrying capacity has been exceeded: the neighbourhood retains its physical appearance but has lost the social and commercial life that made it culturally distinctive. The right to place provides the ethical framework for addressing these exceedances: it asserts that the community’s right to preserve its cultural character should take precedence over the visitor’s right to access and consume it when the two cannot coexist.

Critical evaluation. Cultural carrying capacity is conceptually compelling but operationally challenging: who defines the threshold, by what criteria, and through what governance process? Communities are not homogeneous – property owners who profit from tourism and renters who are displaced by it will define “unacceptable alteration” very differently. The right to place is an emerging ethical principle rather than an established legal right, and it must be balanced against other rights including freedom of movement, economic freedom, and the rights of tourism workers whose livelihoods depend on visitor access. The framework’s usefulness lies in providing a vocabulary for the intuition that some changes to a community’s character are too high a price to pay for tourism’s economic benefits; its limitation is that translating this intuition into measurable thresholds and enforceable governance mechanisms remains an unresolved challenge.

5. Cultural Justice in Tourism: An Emerging Framework

The framework. Cultural justice is an emerging conceptual framework that synthesises insights from the other four frameworks and extends them into a normative vision of how tourism’s cultural and societal impacts should be governed. Drawing on political philosophy (the justice theories of John Rawls, Amartya Sen, and Nancy Fraser), post-colonial theory, and environmental justice, cultural justice in tourism asserts three principles. Recognition justice: the cultures, knowledge systems, and ways of life of host communities must be recognised as possessing intrinsic value, not merely instrumental value as tourism resources to be exploited. Distributive justice: the benefits and costs of tourism must be distributed equitably among all affected parties – visitors, host communities, workers, businesses, and future generations –

rather than concentrated among those with economic and political power. Procedural justice: affected communities must have genuine, meaningful participation in the decisions that shape tourism in their places, including the power to refuse, limit, or redirect tourism development that they judge to be contrary to their interests.

Application to contemporary impacts. The cultural justice framework provides the most comprehensive normative lens for evaluating the impacts examined throughout this module. Applied to the housing crisis: recognition justice demands that the right of a community to affordable, stable housing is recognised as more important than the right of a property owner to maximise rental income through tourist accommodation. Distributive justice demands that the economic benefits of tourism in a city do not accrue exclusively to property owners and platform shareholders while the costs (displacement, congestion, cultural erosion) are borne by the most vulnerable residents. Procedural justice demands that decisions about short-term rental regulation, visitor management, and tourism development are made through democratic processes that give genuine voice to affected residents rather than through market mechanisms that privilege those with economic power. Applied to the cultural erosion problem: recognition justice demands that the intrinsic value of a living geisha tradition, a functioning fishing village, or a residential neighbourhood's daily life is recognised as more important than its value as a tourist attraction. Distributive justice demands that when culture is commodified for tourism, the economic benefit flows to the cultural practitioners and their communities rather than to external operators. Procedural justice demands that cultural communities themselves determine what aspects of their culture are shared with visitors, on what terms, and at what price.

Critical evaluation. Cultural justice provides the most ethically ambitious framework for evaluating tourism's cultural and societal impacts, and its three principles offer clear criteria against which policy, industry practice, and organisational behaviour can be assessed. However, the framework is normative rather than descriptive – it specifies what should be the case rather than explaining what is the case – and its principles are easier to state than to implement. The interests of recognition, distribution, and procedural justice frequently conflict with one another and with legitimate competing interests: the economic needs of tourism workers, the investment expectations of property developers, the growth ambitions of national governments, and the access desires of travellers. Cultural justice does not eliminate these conflicts but provides a framework for negotiating them more honestly and equitably than the alternatives – which is perhaps the most that any ethical framework can achieve.

Table 1. Theoretical Frameworks for Critical Analysis of Tourism's Cultural and Societal Impact

Framework	Core Insight	Strength	Limitation
Tourist Gaze (Urry)	Tourism is a power-laden visual practice; tourists consume places and cultures through culturally constructed ways of seeing	Reveals power dynamics in visual culture; explains social media and algorithmic amplification	Overemphasises visual; underplays embodied experience; can be deterministic
Cultural Commodification (Cohen, MacCannell)	Culture is transformed from lived practice into product for tourist consumption through simplification, decontextualisation, and commercialisation	Explains the mechanism of cultural erosion; differentiates destructive from potentially constructive commodification	Cohen's "emergent authenticity" complicates the narrative; agency of host communities underplayed in some versions

Framework	Core Insight	Strength	Limitation
Social Exchange (Ap)	Host communities support tourism when perceived benefits exceed perceived costs; opposition emerges when the exchange feels unfair	Explains why community attitudes vary; empirically testable; connects to Doxey and Butler	Assumes voluntary exchange and equal power; underplays non-economic values; communities not homogeneous
Cultural Carrying Capacity / Right to Place	There is a level beyond which tourism unacceptably alters a community's cultural identity and social fabric; residents have a right to maintain their place	Provides vocabulary for intuition that some changes are too costly; ethical foundation for resident rights	Threshold is subjective; difficult to operationalise; communities disagree internally; legal status undeveloped
Cultural Justice (recognition, distributive, procedural)	Tourism impacts must be evaluated against principles of cultural recognition, equitable benefit distribution, and genuine community participation in decisions	Most comprehensive normative framework; clear evaluative criteria; synthesises other frameworks	Normative not descriptive; principles conflict with each other and with competing interests; implementation challenging

Synthesis: What Does Critical Knowledge of Cultural and Societal Impact Look Like?

Demonstrating critical knowledge of tourism's impact on culture and society requires the integration of the five frameworks above into a coherent analytical capacity. The student who possesses this critical knowledge can examine any tourism context – a destination, an organisation, a policy, a project, or a trend – and perform several operations simultaneously.

They can identify what is happening: which cultural and societal impacts are occurring, who is affected, and what the observable consequences are. They can explain why it is happening: using the gaze, commodification, social exchange, and carrying capacity frameworks to trace the causal mechanisms that produce the impacts. They can evaluate whose interests are served: using the cultural justice framework to assess whether the distribution of benefits and costs is equitable, whether affected communities have genuine voice, and whether the cultural values at stake are being recognised or instrumentalised. They can assess what the trajectory is: using Doxey's Irridex, Butler's TALC, and the structural change analysis from this module to predict whether impacts are likely to intensify, stabilise, or improve. And they can propose what should be done: translating their analysis into specific recommendations for policy, governance, organisational strategy, and ethical practice that address root causes rather than symptoms.

This integrated analytical capacity is what the learning outcome requires. It is the competency that distinguishes an MBA graduate who can manage within the complex, contested, and culturally consequential environment of contemporary tourism from one who can merely identify problems and list solutions.

Need to Know –

Showing critical knowledge at the MBA level means demonstrating the ability to apply theoretical frameworks to specific contexts, not merely describing impacts or listing frameworks. Assessors expect you to: use at least two of the five frameworks from this section to analyse a specific destination, organisation, or policy situation; move beyond description to explanation (why the impact occurs, not just what it is); evaluate the distributional dimension (whose interests are served); assess the trajectory (where the situation is heading); and propose evidence-informed recommendations that address structural causes. The strongest work recognises that the frameworks sometimes produce conflicting interpretations of the same situation – commodification theory may judge an impact as destructive while social exchange theory judges the same community as satisfied with the trade-off – and navigates this complexity by acknowledging the tension rather than pretending it does not exist. Critical knowledge is the ability to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously while reaching a justified position.

Did you know...?

UNESCO has identified “touristification” as one of the principal threats to World Heritage Sites globally. The organisation’s periodic monitoring reports have documented how tourism pressure at sites including Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Machu Picchu (Peru), the Historic Centre of Prague (Czech Republic), the Old City of Dubrovnik (Croatia), and the Historic Areas of Istanbul (Turkey) is threatening the “Outstanding Universal Value” that justified their inscription in the first place. In several cases, UNESCO has issued formal warnings that sites risk being placed on the World Heritage in Danger list if tourism management is not improved. This institutional recognition that tourism can destroy the heritage it depends upon provides official validation of the cultural carrying capacity concept examined in this section – and demonstrates that the tension between tourism access and cultural preservation is not merely an academic debate but a governance challenge with real consequences for some of the world’s most important cultural assets.

Industry Insight – The Maasai and Safari Tourism: Critical Knowledge Applied to a Living Case of Cultural and Societal Impact

The relationship between Maasai communities in Kenya and Tanzania and the East African safari tourism industry provides one of the most widely studied and most culturally complex cases of tourism’s impact on culture and society. Applying the five frameworks from this section produces a layered, critical understanding that illuminates the strengths and limitations of each framework while demonstrating what integrated critical knowledge looks like in practice.

The tourist gaze. The Maasai are among the most visually iconic peoples in global tourism. The red shuka cloth, beaded jewellery, elongated earlobes, jumping dance (adumu), and pastoral lifestyle against the backdrop of the East African savannah have made the Maasai the most photographed and most recognisable indigenous people in international tourism marketing. This visual iconicity has made the Maasai particularly subject to the tourist gaze: they are seen, photographed, and represented in ways that frequently reduce a complex, evolving society of over two million people to a timeless, exotic visual spectacle. Tourism brochures, safari lodge websites, and social media content consistently present Maasai life through a lens that emphasises visual difference, traditional costume, and pre-modern practices while ignoring the realities of contemporary Maasai life: mobile

phones, formal education, political activism, land rights struggles, and engagement with the global economy. The gaze constructs the Maasai as they are expected to be, not as they are.

Commodification. Maasai cultural performances – village visits, dance demonstrations, bead-making workshops – are a standard component of safari itineraries. These performances exhibit the classic features of cultural commodification: they are simplified (a brief, choreographed performance rather than the hours-long ceremonies that have genuine cultural meaning), decontextualised (performed in tourist-facing settings rather than within the community's own ceremonial life), and commercialised (the primary purpose is revenue generation rather than cultural practice). However, Cohen's concept of emergent authenticity complicates this assessment: many Maasai communities have actively embraced tourism performance as a means of sustaining cultural practices that might otherwise decline, generating income that supports traditional livelihoods, and asserting cultural pride in an environment where modernisation pressures encourage the abandonment of traditional identity. The critical question is who controls the commodification: when external safari operators organise and profit from "Maasai village visits" with minimal community benefit, the commodification is extractive; when Maasai communities themselves design, manage, and receive the revenue from cultural tourism experiences, the commodification can be empowering.

Social exchange. The social exchange between Maasai communities and the safari tourism industry has historically been deeply unequal. National parks and game reserves were in many cases created by colonial and post-colonial governments on Maasai ancestral land, displacing communities from territory they had occupied for centuries. The wildlife that tourism visitors come to see is sustained by ecosystems that the Maasai maintained through their pastoral practices for generations, yet the economic benefits of wildlife tourism have historically flowed to international safari operators, national park authorities, and the national treasury rather than to the communities who co-created and co-exist with the wildlife habitat. Community conservancies, as examined in the Tourism Policy module, represent an attempt to rebalance this exchange by giving Maasai communities legal rights to wildlife on their land and a direct share of tourism revenue, but the balance remains contested and the power asymmetry between international operators and local communities persists.

Cultural carrying capacity. Different Maasai communities have reached different positions on the cultural carrying capacity spectrum. Communities near major safari circuits like the Maasai Mara experience intense tourism pressure: daily visits by tourist vehicles, constant demand for cultural performances, and the economic incentive to prioritise tourism-facing activities over pastoral and ceremonial life. For these communities, the cultural carrying capacity may be approaching or exceeding its threshold – the volume and intensity of tourism encounters is altering the daily rhythms, social structures, and cultural practices of the community in ways that some community members experience as erosion rather than enrichment. More remote communities with less tourism exposure retain greater cultural autonomy but may lack the economic benefits that tourism provides. The concept of cultural carrying capacity in this context is inseparable from questions of self-determination: who within the Maasai community has the right to decide how much tourism is too much, and whose assessment of cultural change – elders who remember pre-tourism life, or young people who see tourism as an economic opportunity – should prevail?

Cultural justice assessment. Applying the cultural justice framework to the Maasai-tourism relationship reveals significant deficits across all three dimensions. Recognition justice: Maasai culture is instrumentalised as a tourism resource rather than recognised for its intrinsic value; the marketing representation of the Maasai as timeless pastoralists denies the complexity and contemporaneity of Maasai society. Distributive justice: the economic benefits of safari tourism remain disproportionately captured by international operators and national institutions relative to the Maasai communities whose land, culture, and co-existence with wildlife make the tourism product possible. Procedural justice: Maasai communities have historically had limited participation in the governance decisions that shape tourism on their ancestral lands, from national park boundary determinations to wildlife management policies to tourism licensing decisions. The community

conservancy model represents a significant improvement in procedural justice, but it operates within a broader governance framework that continues to privilege national and international interests over local community self-determination.

The Maasai case demonstrates what critical knowledge of tourism's cultural and societal impact looks like in practice: the ability to apply multiple theoretical frameworks to the same situation, to recognise where they converge and where they produce different assessments, and to reach a nuanced, evidence-informed position that acknowledges both the potential for tourism to support cultural vitality and the structural conditions that must be met for that potential to be realised.

Over to You – Capstone Activity

This capstone activity requires you to demonstrate critical knowledge of tourism's impact on culture and society by applying multiple theoretical frameworks to a specific case, supported by academic evidence.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines tourism's impact on culture or society in a specific destination, community, or organisational context. Using the article as your evidence base, write an analytical essay (approximately 800–1,000 words) that demonstrates critical knowledge by applying at least three of the five frameworks from this section to the case examined.

Suggested search terms: “tourist gaze destination” • “cultural commodification tourism” • “resident attitudes tourism social exchange” • “cultural carrying capacity destination” • “tourism cultural justice indigenous” • “tourism impact host community culture” • “authenticity tourism cultural impact” • “touristification urban cultural change”

Your essay should include: (1) A brief description of the case and its cultural/societal context. (2) Application of at least three frameworks, showing what each reveals about the impact. (3) Identification of where the frameworks converge (produce similar assessments) and where they diverge (produce different or conflicting assessments). (4) A cultural justice evaluation: assess the case against the three principles of recognition, distributive, and procedural justice. (5) A trajectory assessment: is the cultural/societal impact improving, stabilising, or worsening, and what evidence supports your assessment? (6) Recommendations for how the impacts could be better managed, referencing at least one concept from this module (governance innovation, community agency, cultural alignment, trend response) to justify your proposals.

Revision on the Go

- Five frameworks for critical analysis: tourist gaze (Urry), cultural commodification (Cohen, MacCannell), social exchange (Ap), cultural carrying capacity/right to place, and cultural justice (recognition, distributive, procedural).
- Tourist gaze: tourism is a power-laden visual practice; social media and AI intensify and broadcast the gaze; cultural practitioners become objects of consumption.
- Commodification: culture transformed from lived practice into product through simplification, decontextualisation, standardisation, and commercialisation. Cohen's counter: emergent authenticity can occur when communities control the process.
- Social exchange: communities support tourism when perceived benefits exceed costs; opposition emerges when the exchange feels unfair. Connects to Doxey's Irridex and Butler's TALC.

- Cultural carrying capacity: the level beyond which tourism unacceptably alters a community's cultural identity. Inherently subjective; operationally challenging; the right to place provides ethical foundation.
- Cultural justice: recognition (cultures have intrinsic not just instrumental value), distributive (benefits and costs distributed equitably), procedural (genuine community participation in decisions). Most comprehensive normative framework.
- UNESCO identifies "touristification" as a principal threat to World Heritage Sites globally, validating the cultural carrying capacity concept.
- Critical knowledge = integrated analytical capacity: identify what is happening → explain why → evaluate whose interests are served → assess trajectory → propose what should be done.
- Frameworks sometimes conflict: commodification theory may judge an impact destructive while social exchange theory shows the community is satisfied. Critical knowledge navigates this tension honestly.
- The critical question across all frameworks: who controls the encounter, who captures the value, and who bears the cost? When communities control the terms, tourism can support cultural vitality; when external actors control, it tends toward extraction.

Case Study – The Cultural and Societal Impact of Tourism on Havana, Cuba

Background

Havana, Cuba's capital city of approximately 2.1 million people, provides an unusually rich case for demonstrating critical knowledge of tourism's cultural and societal impact. Cuba's unique political and economic system – a socialist state with a centrally planned economy, limited private enterprise, and a complex relationship with the United States that has included decades of economic embargo – means that tourism in Havana operates within conditions that are fundamentally different from the market economies where most tourism scholarship has been developed. The partial opening of the Cuban economy to private enterprise and international tourism since the 1990s, and particularly the thaw in US-Cuba relations in 2014–2017 that briefly opened American tourist travel, created a natural experiment in how tourism impacts a society whose cultural identity is inseparable from its political ideology.

The Tourist Gaze and Havana's Frozen-in-Time Aesthetic

Havana's tourism appeal is intimately connected to the tourist gaze. The city's visual identity – 1950s American classic cars, crumbling colonial architecture, pastel-coloured buildings, salsa music, cigar-smoking elders, and the romantic melancholy of a faded grandeur – is among the most powerfully constructed destination images in global tourism. This visual identity is the product of the US economic embargo, which prevented the importation of new vehicles and building materials for decades, creating an unintended urban time capsule. Tourists consume Havana through a gaze that romanticises poverty and political isolation as picturesque charm, a process critics describe as "poverty tourism" or "rustalgia" – the aestheticisation of decay. The classic car, which for the tourist is a charming prop in an Instagram photograph, is for its Cuban owner a necessity born of scarcity; the crumbling building, which the visitor photographs as evocative atmosphere, is for its occupant a structurally dangerous home that the state cannot afford to repair. The tourist gaze in Havana constructs a destination that is beautiful precisely because it is impoverished, creating a perverse dynamic in which modernisation and improved living conditions would diminish the very qualities that attract visitors.

Commodification and the Dual Economy

Tourism in Havana has created a dual economy that generates acute social tension. Cubans who work in the tourist economy – particularly those in private *casas particulares* (guesthouses), *paladares* (private restaurants), and as taxi drivers – can earn in a single day what a state-employed doctor or teacher earns in a month. This income disparity has inverted the social value system of a society that was built on the principle of economic equality: education, professional achievement, and public service – the pillars of revolutionary Cuban identity – are economically devalued relative to serving tourists. Highly educated professionals leave their careers to work as waiters, guides, or *casa* operators because the tourist economy pays vastly more than the state economy. Cuban culture – music, dance, art, cuisine – has been commodified for tourist consumption: salsa performances, Buena Vista Social Club nostalgia, cigar-rolling demonstrations, and art market experiences are packaged for visitors in ways that simplify the richness and complexity of Cuban cultural life into digestible, purchasable encounters.

Social Exchange and the Inequality Paradox

The social exchange in Havana is complicated by Cuba's political context. Tourism provides desperately needed foreign exchange and economic opportunity in an economy constrained by embargo and central planning. Many Cubans welcome tourism for the income, material goods, and connection to the outside world it provides. However, the exchange has produced inequality in a society whose founding ideology rejects it: the emergence of a tourism-connected economic elite coexisting with a state-employed majority earning subsistence wages represents a cultural and ideological rupture that challenges the social cohesion that Cuban identity has historically derived from shared sacrifice and relative equality. The Doxey Irridex trajectory is detectable: initial enthusiasm for tourism's economic benefits has given way, in some communities, to resentment of the inequality, cultural disruption, and sense of being performing extras in a tourist fantasy rather than citizens of a sovereign society with their own aspirations and agency.

Cultural Justice Assessment

Recognition justice: Cuban culture is frequently instrumentalised in tourism as a nostalgic spectacle rather than recognised as a living, evolving civilisation. The revolutionary heritage, the contemporary art scene, the scientific and educational achievements, and the complex, contested political identity of Cuban society receive far less tourism attention than the classic cars, the rum, and the salsa. Distributive justice: the economic benefits of tourism concentrate among those with access to the tourist economy, creating inequality that contradicts Cuba's egalitarian social contract. Procedural justice: tourism policy in Cuba is determined by the state with limited public input, and the constraints of the political system mean that communities affected by tourism have restricted channels for expressing dissent or demanding changes to tourism development that affects their neighbourhoods and livelihoods.

Discussion Questions

1. Apply all five frameworks from this section to Havana's case. Where do they converge, and where do they produce different or conflicting assessments of tourism's cultural impact?
2. The tourist gaze in Havana romanticises poverty as aesthetic charm. Is this ethically problematic, or is it an unavoidable consequence of the visual culture of tourism? How would Urry's framework assess this dynamic?
3. The dual economy created by tourism inverts Cuban society's value system: tourism workers earn more than doctors and teachers. Using the social exchange and cultural justice frameworks, evaluate whether this inversion represents a positive economic impact or a destructive cultural one – or both simultaneously.
4. Cohen's concept of emergent authenticity suggests that commodified cultural practices can acquire genuine meaning. Is this happening with Cuban cultural tourism (salsa, cuisine, music), or is

the commodification purely extractive? What evidence would you need to distinguish between the two?

5. If Cuba's economy modernises and the classic cars, crumbling buildings, and time-capsule aesthetic that attract tourists are replaced by contemporary infrastructure, will Havana's tourism appeal survive? What does your answer reveal about the nature of the tourist gaze and the authenticity paradox?

2.4 Explain the concepts of postmodern, post-industrial and post-colonial in context of tourism

Introduction

Three “post-” concepts – postmodern, post-industrial, and post-colonial – provide essential theoretical lenses for understanding the cultural and societal dimensions of contemporary tourism. Each describes a condition that has emerged after (and in reaction to) a preceding era: postmodernism after modernism, post-industrialism after industrialism, and post-colonialism after colonialism. Together, they explain how the cultural meaning of travel has changed, how the economic structures within which tourism operates have been transformed, and how the power relationships that shape tourism across the global system continue to reflect historical legacies of domination and exploitation.

At the MBA level, explaining these concepts in the context of tourism means more than reciting definitions. It requires demonstrating that you understand how each concept illuminates specific features of the contemporary tourism landscape that would be invisible without the theoretical lens it provides, how the three concepts interact and overlap, and how they inform the practical decisions that hospitality and tourism managers, policy-makers, and destination leaders make.

1. Postmodern Tourism: The Collapse of Boundaries and the Culture of Simulation

The concept. Postmodernism is a broad intellectual and cultural movement that emerged in the latter decades of the twentieth century as a reaction against the certainties of modernity – the Enlightenment belief in universal reason, progress, objectivity, and the existence of singular, discoverable truths. Postmodernism is characterised by scepticism toward grand narratives (universal stories about progress, history, or human nature), the celebration of plurality, fragmentation, and difference rather than unity and coherence, the blurring of boundaries between high culture and popular culture, between the real and the simulated, between the original and the copy, and an emphasis on surface, image, and spectacle over depth, substance, and meaning. Key theorists associated with postmodernism include Jean-François Lyotard (who defined the postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives”), Jean Baudrillard (who analysed the proliferation of simulations and hyperreality), and Fredric Jameson (who connected postmodern culture to the logic of late capitalism).

Postmodern tourism in practice. Applied to tourism, postmodernism illuminates several defining features of the contemporary landscape. The collapse of the distinction between the authentic and the simulated: in the modern tourist paradigm (as analysed by MacCannell), the tourist searched for the authentic – the “real” culture behind the staged performance. In the postmodern paradigm, this distinction loses its force. The postmodern tourist does not necessarily seek authenticity and may actively enjoy the simulated, the staged, and the hyperreal. Themed environments such as Las Vegas, Dubai, and theme parks do not pretend to be real places; they are openly artificial constructions that visitors knowingly enter as participants in a shared performance. A visitor to the Venetian hotel in Las Vegas is not deceived into thinking they are in Venice – they are enjoying a simulation of Venice that is experienced as pleasurable precisely because everyone involved acknowledges the artifice. This represents a fundamentally different relationship between tourism and reality than the modern authenticity-seeking paradigm.

The de-differentiation of tourism. Postmodernism is characterised by de-differentiation – the collapse of previously clear distinctions. In tourism, this manifests as the blurring of boundaries between tourism and shopping (the airport as retail destination; the shopping mall as tourist attraction), between tourism and entertainment (screen tourism; themed attractions; immersive experiences that combine theatre with travel), between tourism and everyday life (the “touristification” of cities where residents become tourists in their own neighbourhoods; the Instagram aesthetic that applies tourist-gaze photography to daily environments), between work and leisure (the digital nomad; the bleisure traveller; the workation), and between the tourist and the host (Airbnb positioning the tourist within residential spaces; couchsurfing; community exchange platforms). These de-differentiations are defining features of contemporary tourism and are directly traceable to the postmodern cultural condition.

The tourist as playful, ironic, and self-aware. The modern tourist, in the classical sociological account, was a somewhat earnest figure: either seeking authentic experience (MacCannell) or being manipulated by the tourism industry (critical theory). The postmodern tourist is a more knowing, playful, and ironic figure: aware that tourism involves performance, staging, and commercial construction, and participating in the game with self-conscious enjoyment rather than naïve sincerity. The postmodern tourist takes selfies at landmarks with deliberate awareness that they are performing the role of tourist; they visit “tourist traps” ironically; they consume destinations through social media filters that openly transform reality into aestheticised imagery; and they move between registers of authenticity-seeking and simulation-enjoyment without experiencing contradiction. This playful, boundary-crossing, self-aware tourist is the cultural subject that contemporary hospitality must understand and serve.

Critical evaluation. The postmodern framework is powerful for explaining the features of contemporary tourism that the modern authenticity paradigm cannot account for: the popularity of themed and simulated environments, the de-differentiation of tourism from other domains of life, the ironic self-awareness of contemporary travellers, and the social media culture that turns all experience into performed image. However, it has been criticised for potentially trivialising the power dynamics of tourism by treating everything as play, performance, and surface, and for neglecting the material consequences of tourism (displacement, environmental damage, labour exploitation) that are real regardless of whether they are framed in postmodern or modern terms. Communities displaced by tourism gentrification are not experiencing a simulation; their loss is not ironic. The critical task is to use postmodern insights where they illuminate (the cultural meaning of tourism experience) while maintaining material analysis where it is needed (the economic and social consequences of tourism’s structural power).

2. Post-Industrial Tourism: The Service Economy, the Experience Economy, and the Transformation of Place

The concept. Post-industrialism describes the transformation of advanced economies from manufacturing-based production to service-based and knowledge-based economies. The concept was developed by sociologist Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), which argued that the economies of Western nations were shifting from the production of physical goods to the provision of services, information, and experiences, with corresponding changes in employment structures (from factory workers to service and knowledge workers), economic value creation (from tangible products to intangible services), and the cultural significance of consumption (from meeting material needs to expressing identity and pursuing personal fulfilment). The post-industrial condition is inseparable from globalisation: manufacturing did not disappear but was relocated to lower-cost economies in Asia and the Global South, while

service, knowledge, and experience industries came to dominate the economies of Europe, North America, Japan, and other developed nations.

Post-industrial tourism in practice. Post-industrialism has shaped contemporary tourism in several fundamental ways. Tourism as the successor economy to manufacturing: across the developed world, cities and regions whose economies were historically based on heavy industry – coal, steel, textiles, shipbuilding, car manufacturing – have turned to tourism and the creative economy as successor industries when deindustrialisation destroyed traditional employment. The transformation of industrial heritage into tourism product is a defining feature of post-industrial tourism: former factories become art galleries and event spaces, derelict docklands become waterfront dining and entertainment precincts, abandoned mines become heritage attractions, and the industrial archaeology of blast furnaces, railway yards, and mill buildings is repurposed as the aesthetic backdrop for a new creative and leisure economy. Cities including Manchester, Liverpool, Bilbao, Detroit, Pittsburgh, the Ruhr region, and dozens of others have pursued tourism-led regeneration strategies as the primary means of replacing the economic base that deindustrialisation removed.

The experience economy as post-industrial logic. Pine and Gilmore's experience economy, discussed in earlier sections of this module, is fundamentally a post-industrial concept. In an industrial economy, value is created by manufacturing physical products. In a post-industrial economy, value migrates from products to services, and from services to experiences. Tourism is the quintessential experience industry – an industry that creates value not by producing tangible goods but by designing, staging, and facilitating memorable encounters between people and places. The entire trend toward experiential, immersive, participatory tourism examined throughout this module reflects the post-industrial shift from material production to experience production as the dominant mode of economic value creation.

The transformation of urban space. Post-industrial transformation has profoundly altered the spatial organisation of cities in ways that directly affect tourism. Industrial-era cities were organised around factories, warehouses, docks, and railway yards; post-industrial cities are organised around cultural quarters, entertainment districts, waterfront promenades, creative hubs, and leisure precincts. The conversion of disused industrial infrastructure into tourism and cultural infrastructure has created distinctive urban landscapes that attract visitors: Tate Modern in London (a former power station), the Distillery District in Toronto (a former whiskey distillery), the Landschaftspark in Duisburg (a former ironworks transformed into a public park), and the Zeche Zollverein in Essen (a former coal mine now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and cultural complex). These conversions demonstrate how post-industrial economies create tourism value from the material remains of industrial economies – transforming the architecture of production into the architecture of consumption.

The cultural consequences and critical evaluation. Post-industrial tourism-led regeneration has generated significant cultural and societal consequences that require critical assessment. Gentrification is the most widely documented: the conversion of industrial areas into cultural and tourism precincts attracts investment, raises property values, and displaces the working-class communities who lived alongside the industries that have departed. The creative class whose presence anchors the cultural economy is itself frequently displaced as the success of the creative quarter it helped establish drives rents beyond the level that artists, musicians, and independent cultural producers can afford. The heritage interpretation of industrial sites raises questions about whose history is told: industrial heritage tourism tends to aestheticise the physical structures of industry while sanitising the human experiences – the dangerous working conditions, the exploitation of labour, the environmental pollution, and the class inequalities – that characterised the industrial era. And the reliance on tourism as a successor economy raises the

structural vulnerabilities that this programme has examined extensively: the precarity of tourism employment compared to industrial employment, the seasonal and volatile nature of tourism demand, and the risk that tourism-led regeneration produces a service economy characterised by low wages, insecure work, and limited career progression – conditions that may replicate rather than resolve the deprivation that deindustrialisation caused.

3. Post-Colonial Tourism: Power, Representation, and the Legacy of Empire

The concept. Post-colonialism is both a historical condition (the period after former colonies achieved political independence) and a critical intellectual framework that examines how the power structures, economic relationships, cultural representations, and knowledge systems established during the colonial era persist in the contemporary world. Key theorists include Edward Said (whose concept of Orientalism analysed how the West constructed and represented the “East” as exotic, irrational, and inferior), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (who asked whether the subaltern – the colonised, the marginalised – can speak within systems of knowledge dominated by colonial epistemologies), and Homi Bhabha (who examined the ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity that characterise post-colonial cultural identity). Post-colonial theory is not merely about the past; it analyses how colonialism’s legacies continue to shape the present, including the present of international tourism.

Post-colonial tourism in practice. Post-colonial analysis reveals that international tourism reproduces colonial power dynamics in multiple dimensions. The geography of tourism flows: the dominant pattern of international tourism – visitors from wealthy, predominantly Western nations travelling to destinations in the Global South – mirrors the colonial geography of movement between metropole and periphery. The economic structure: as examined in the Tourism Policy module, the international tourism value chain concentrates the highest-value activities (aviation, distribution, hotel management, online platforms) in former colonial and developed nations while destination countries in the former colonial world supply low-cost labour, natural environments, and cultural spectacles for visitor consumption, retaining a fraction of the expenditure through economic leakage. The representational regime: tourism marketing for destinations across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Latin America frequently draws on imagery and narratives rooted in colonial-era representations – the exotic other, the pristine wilderness, the timeless traditional society, the welcoming native – that position the destination as a space of escape, fantasy, and consumption for the Western traveller rather than as a complex, contemporary society with its own agency and aspirations.

Heritage tourism and the colonial narrative. Post-colonial analysis is particularly illuminating when applied to heritage tourism. Many of the world’s most visited heritage tourism sites in former colonies – plantation great houses in the Caribbean, colonial architecture in Southeast Asia, European fortress and church complexes in sub-Saharan Africa, railway and administrative buildings in South Asia – are the physical infrastructure of colonial rule. How these sites are interpreted for tourists reveals whose history is centred and whose is marginalised. A plantation great house tour that focuses on the architecture, furnishings, and lifestyle of the planter family while mentioning the enslaved people who built and maintained the estate only in passing perpetuates a colonial narrative. A former colonial fort that is presented as a picturesque setting for sunset photographs without engaging with its role in the slave trade, military conquest, and the subjugation of indigenous peoples sanitises colonial violence. The emerging practice of decolonising heritage interpretation – centering the experiences of colonised peoples, acknowledging colonial violence honestly, and restoring indigenous names, narratives, and

perspectives to sites that were historically interpreted through the coloniser's lens – represents the most significant post-colonial intervention in tourism practice.

Indigenous tourism and self-determination. The most progressive expression of post-colonial thinking in tourism practice is the development of indigenous-owned, indigenous-managed tourism enterprises that enable indigenous communities to tell their own stories, on their own terms, for their own benefit. Māori tourism enterprises in New Zealand (such as Tamaki Māori Village and Whale Watch Kaikoura), Aboriginal-owned tourism experiences in Australia (Welcome to Country programmes, indigenous ranger-guided tours, art centre visits), First Nations tourism in Canada (Spirit Bear Lodge in Klemtu, indigenous cultural journeys in British Columbia), and Sami tourism in northern Scandinavia all represent communities asserting agency within a global tourism system that has historically represented, commodified, and profited from indigenous cultures without indigenous consent or proportionate benefit. These enterprises demonstrate that post-colonial tourism is not merely a critique of existing power structures but a practical movement toward cultural self-determination within the tourism economy.

Critical evaluation. Post-colonial theory provides an indispensable lens for understanding why the global tourism system is structured as it is, whose interests it serves, and why the power imbalances documented throughout this programme persist. However, it has been criticised for sometimes presenting host communities as passive victims of neo-colonial exploitation without adequately recognising their agency, entrepreneurship, and capacity for strategic engagement with the global tourism economy. It has also been criticised for its predominantly academic register, which can make its insights inaccessible to the practitioners and policy-makers who are best positioned to act on them. The challenge for MBA students is to translate post-colonial insights into actionable practice: supporting indigenous tourism enterprise, demanding honest heritage interpretation, advocating for equitable value chain structures, and recognising that their own position within the global system – as educated professionals in a wealthy-nation hospitality industry – is itself a product of the historical processes that post-colonial theory describes.

4. Intersections: How the Three “Post-” Concepts Interact in Contemporary Tourism

The three concepts are not separate phenomena operating in different domains; they intersect and interact in ways that create the complex cultural landscape of contemporary tourism.

Postmodern and post-industrial intersection. The de-differentiation that postmodernism describes is produced in part by the post-industrial economic condition. When manufacturing declines and experience becomes the primary mode of value creation, the boundaries between production and consumption, work and leisure, everyday life and tourism collapse because the economic logic that maintained them – the separation of the factory (where you produced) from the home (where you consumed) – no longer operates. The themed environments of Las Vegas and Dubai are simultaneously postmodern (simulations that play with the distinction between real and artificial) and post-industrial (experience products created by service economies that have transcended manufacturing).

Post-industrial and post-colonial intersection. The post-industrial transformation of Western economies was enabled by the globalisation of manufacturing to the Global South – a process that post-colonial analysis recognises as a continuation of colonial economic relationships in which wealthy nations extract value from poorer ones. The Western cities that now attract tourists to their cultural quarters, converted factories, and creative economies were able to

undergo this transformation because their manufacturing capacity was relocated to countries whose lower labour costs and weaker environmental regulations are themselves products of colonial and post-colonial power structures. The post-industrial tourism economy of a city like Manchester or Bilbao is built on a global division of labour that post-colonial theory analyses as structurally exploitative.

Postmodern and post-colonial intersection. Postmodernism's celebration of plurality, difference, and the local has created space for post-colonial voices that were silenced under modernism's universalising narratives. The postmodern rejection of grand narratives opens possibilities for indigenous peoples, formerly colonised societies, and marginalised communities to assert their own cultural narratives against the dominant Western stories that modernism imposed. However, postmodernism's emphasis on surface, spectacle, and the collapse of authenticity can also depoliticise post-colonial critique: if everything is performance and simulation, the material inequalities that post-colonialism analyses become just another story among many rather than a structural injustice demanding redress. The tension between postmodern pluralism and post-colonial justice is one of the most intellectually challenging intersections in the study of culture and society in tourism.

The triple intersection in a single destination. Consider a former colonial port city – say, Cape Town, Cartagena, or Goa – that has been transformed into a major tourism destination. The city is post-colonial (its architecture, spatial organisation, social hierarchies, and economic structures were established under colonial rule and continue to shape the present). It is post-industrial (its economic base has shifted from primary production and trade to services, tourism, and the creative economy). And it is postmodern (its tourism product blurs the boundaries between heritage and entertainment, between authentic cultural encounter and staged performance, between the historical reality of colonial exploitation and the aestheticised experience of colonial architecture as tourism spectacle). All three lenses are needed to understand the city's tourism comprehensively; none is sufficient alone.

Table 1. Comparison of the Three “Post-” Concepts in Tourism

Dimension	Postmodern	Post-Industrial	Post-Colonial
What it follows	Modernism (Enlightenment rationality; universal truth; progress narrative)	Industrialism (manufacturing as dominant economic mode)	Colonialism (European imperial domination of Asia, Africa, Americas, Pacific)
Core condition	Scepticism toward grand narratives; blurring of boundaries; simulation and image; irony and play	Shift from goods production to services, knowledge, and experiences	Persistence of colonial power structures, representations, and economic relationships after political independence
Key theorists	Lyotard; Baudrillard; Jameson; Urry (tourist gaze)	Bell (post-industrial society); Pine and Gilmore (experience economy)	Said (Orientalism); Spivak (subaltern); Bhabha (hybridity); Fanon (decolonisation)
Tourism manifestation	Themed/simulated environments; de-differentiation of tourism from daily life; ironic/playful tourist; social media as image culture	Tourism as successor economy to manufacturing; industrial heritage conversion; experience economy; urban regeneration	Colonial-era tourism flows; value chain inequality; exoticising marketing; plantation/colonial heritage interpretation; indigenous tourism self-determination
What it explains	Why contemporary tourists enjoy simulations; why	Why deindustrialised cities pursue tourism-led	Why the global tourism value chain concentrates value in the

Dimension	Postmodern	Post-Industrial	Post-Colonial
	boundaries between tourism and daily life are dissolving; why image and spectacle dominate travel culture	regeneration; why experience has replaced product as the primary unit of value; why urban spaces are reorganised around leisure	West; why destination marketing perpetuates colonial imagery; why heritage interpretation centres colonial narratives
Critical limitation	Can trivialise material consequences (displacement, exploitation) by treating everything as play and surface	Tourism-led regeneration may produce gentrification, precarious employment, and a service economy that replicates industrial-era inequalities	Can present host communities as passive victims without recognising agency; academic register limits practical accessibility
Hospitality implication	Design for multiple registers (authentic and simulated); embrace social media culture; create playful, layered experiences	Convert heritage assets; develop experience-led products; address gentrification and labour quality in regeneration	Ensure equitable value distribution; support indigenous enterprise; demand honest heritage interpretation; challenge exoticising marketing

Need to Know –

Explaining the three “post-” concepts in the context of tourism at the MBA level requires more than defining terms. Assessors expect you to: explain each concept in your own words with specific tourism examples (not just textbook definitions); demonstrate understanding of what each concept reveals about contemporary tourism that would be invisible without it; analyse how the three concepts interact and overlap rather than treating them as separate, unrelated frameworks; apply the concepts to specific destinations, organisations, or phenomena from this module; and critically evaluate each concept’s usefulness and limitations for understanding the cultural and societal dimensions of tourism. The strongest work uses all three concepts as complementary lenses on a single case – showing how a destination, an organisation, or a tourism phenomenon is simultaneously postmodern, post-industrial, and post-colonial in ways that each concept alone would miss.

Did you know...?

Dubai’s tourism industry represents perhaps the world’s most extreme expression of all three “post-” conditions simultaneously. It is postmodern in its deliberate construction of hyperreal environments – indoor ski slopes in the desert, artificial islands shaped like palm trees, replicas of global landmarks, and themed hotels that create simulated worlds without any pretence of authenticity. It is post-industrial in its transition from a pearling and trading economy to a service, knowledge, and experience economy within a single generation, leapfrogging the industrial stage entirely. And it is post-colonial in its positioning within a global system where the luxury tourism product is created by migrant labour from South and Southeast Asia working under the kafala sponsorship system – a labour regime that post-colonial scholars analyse as a contemporary form of bonded labour that reproduces the power asymmetries of the colonial era within a hypermodern urban environment. Dubai demonstrates that the three “post-” concepts are not abstract academic categories but

analytical tools that illuminate the real structures, contradictions, and power dynamics of the world's most visible tourism destinations.

Industry Insight – Liverpool: Where Postmodern, Post-Industrial, and Post-Colonial Converge in a Single Tourism Destination

Liverpool, in the north-west of England, provides an exceptionally rich case study for explaining how the three “post-” concepts converge in a single destination. The city’s tourism product is simultaneously postmodern, post-industrial, and post-colonial in ways that illuminate all three concepts and their interactions.

Post-industrial Liverpool. Liverpool’s economy was built on its port – one of the world’s great commercial harbours that handled the import of raw materials from the British Empire and the export of manufactured goods during the Industrial Revolution. The decline of the port and the deindustrialisation of the surrounding region from the 1970s onward devastated Liverpool’s economy, producing mass unemployment, urban decay, and social deprivation. The city’s tourism-led regeneration strategy has been one of the most ambitious in Britain: the Albert Dock (a UNESCO World Heritage-listed former warehouse complex) was converted into museums, galleries, restaurants, and hotels; the city won the European Capital of Culture designation in 2008, catalysing investment in cultural infrastructure and international visibility; and the Beatles heritage industry (the Cavern Club, Beatles Story museum, Magical Mystery Tour, Penny Lane) became the centrepiece of a pop culture tourism economy that attracts millions of visitors annually. Liverpool’s tourism is quintessentially post-industrial: the city has replaced the production of goods with the production of experiences, converted the physical infrastructure of trade and industry into the architecture of leisure and culture, and repositioned itself from an industrial powerhouse to a cultural and heritage destination.

Post-colonial Liverpool. Liverpool’s mercantile wealth was built substantially on the transatlantic slave trade. Between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Liverpool was Britain’s leading slave-trading port, and the profits from the trade funded the construction of the grand civic buildings, merchant townhouses, and cultural institutions that now form the core of the city’s heritage tourism product. This colonial and slave-trade heritage creates a profound interpretive challenge: how should a city whose architectural grandeur was funded by human enslavement present that heritage to visitors? The International Slavery Museum, opened in 2007 in the Albert Dock – on the same waterfront from which slave ships departed – represents one of the world’s most significant attempts to confront colonial heritage honestly within a tourism context. The museum centres the experiences of enslaved Africans, examines the global legacy of the slave trade, and connects historical slavery to contemporary forms of exploitation and racism. Its positioning within the Albert Dock tourism precinct creates an encounter that most heritage tourism sites avoid: visitors moving between the pleasurable consumption of the waterfront’s restaurants and galleries and the confrontation with the historical violence that created the wealth to build them.

Postmodern Liverpool. Liverpool’s tourism product exhibits distinctively postmodern characteristics. The Beatles heritage industry is a case study in postmodern de-differentiation: the boundary between cultural history and commercial entertainment, between genuine heritage site and themed attraction, between the authentic and the simulated, is deliberately blurred. The Cavern Club that tourists visit is not the original venue where the Beatles performed (that was demolished in 1973) but a reconstruction built on an adjacent site using some of the original bricks – a simulation of authenticity that visitors knowingly consume as both heritage and entertainment. The Beatles Story museum mixes genuine artefacts with theatrical staging, immersive set pieces, and soundtrack-accompanied environments that prioritise emotional experience over historical accuracy. Visitors do not necessarily

care whether the experience is “real” in the modernist sense; they are participating in a cultural celebration that is openly performative, commercially constructed, and experientially pleasurable. This postmodern relationship with heritage – where the distinction between the authentic and the simulated is acknowledged, enjoyed, and rendered irrelevant by the quality of the experience – is characteristic of contemporary cultural tourism worldwide.

The triple convergence. Liverpool demonstrates that the three “post-” concepts are not separate categories but overlapping conditions that shape the same destination simultaneously. A visitor walking along the Albert Dock waterfront moves through a landscape that is post-industrial (converted warehouses), post-colonial (buildings funded by slave-trade wealth, with the International Slavery Museum confronting that history), and postmodern (a curated mix of heritage, entertainment, dining, and cultural experience where the boundaries between education and leisure, history and spectacle, are deliberately dissolved). Understanding Liverpool’s tourism through any single lens would miss essential dimensions that the other two reveal.

For MBA students, Liverpool illustrates why the three “post-” concepts are not merely academic exercises but practical analytical tools. A hospitality manager developing a product in Liverpool’s tourism market needs to understand the post-industrial logic of experience-economy value creation, the post-colonial sensitivity of heritage interpretation in a city built on slave-trade wealth, and the postmodern cultural environment in which visitors consume heritage as both education and entertainment. The concepts are not abstract; they are the intellectual infrastructure for informed practice in culturally complex destinations.



Over to You – Activity

This activity requires you to apply the three “post-” concepts to a specific tourism context, supported by academic evidence.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that applies postmodern, post-industrial, or post-colonial analysis to a tourism destination, phenomenon, or organisation. Write an analytical essay (approximately 600–800 words) that: explains which of the three concepts the article applies and how; identifies whether the other two concepts are also relevant to the case (even if the article does not address them); provides at least one specific tourism example for each of the three concepts, drawing from the article and from your own knowledge; and concludes with a reflection on which concept you consider most useful for understanding the cultural and societal dimensions of contemporary tourism, and why.

Suggested search terms: “postmodern tourism” • “post-industrial heritage tourism” • “post-colonial tourism representation” • “tourism hyperreality Baudrillard” • “industrial heritage tourism regeneration” • “decolonising heritage interpretation” • “indigenous tourism self-determination” • “simulation authenticity tourism” • “plantation tourism colonial” • “experience economy post-industrial”



Revision on the Go

- Three “post-” concepts provide essential lenses for understanding contemporary tourism: postmodern (after modernism), post-industrial (after industrialism), post-colonial (after colonialism).
- Postmodern: scepticism toward grand narratives; collapse of boundaries (authentic/simulated, tourism/daily life, work/leisure); celebration of surface, image, spectacle; ironic, playful, self-aware tourist. Key: Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson.

- Postmodern tourism examples: Las Vegas/Dubai hyperreality; social media image culture; de-differentiation of tourism from shopping, entertainment, daily life; screen tourism; the reconstructed Cavern Club.
- Post-industrial: shift from manufacturing to services, knowledge, and experiences; tourism as successor economy to deindustrialised regions; industrial heritage conversion; Pine and Gilmore's experience economy. Key: Daniel Bell.
- Post-industrial examples: Tate Modern (power station → gallery); Albert Dock (warehouses → tourism); Bilbao Guggenheim effect; Zeche Zollverein (coal mine → UNESCO cultural complex).
- Post-colonial: persistence of colonial power structures in tourism flows, value chains, representations, and heritage interpretation. Key: Said (Orientalism), Spivak (subaltern), Bhabha (hybridity).
- Post-colonial examples: exoticising marketing of Global South destinations; plantation tourism sanitising slavery; economic leakage as neo-colonial extraction; indigenous tourism enterprises as cultural self-determination.
- The concepts interact: postmodern + post-industrial (experience economy as post-industrial logic within postmodern culture); post-industrial + post-colonial (Western service economies enabled by global manufacturing relocation to former colonies); postmodern + post-colonial (postmodern pluralism opens space for post-colonial voices but can depoliticise material injustice).
- Dubai exemplifies all three simultaneously: hyperreal environments (postmodern), leapfrogged industrial stage (post-industrial), migrant labour under kafala (post-colonial power asymmetry).
- The strongest analysis applies all three lenses to the same destination or phenomenon: each reveals dimensions the others miss; none is sufficient alone.

Case Study – Cartagena de Indias, Colombia: A City Where All Three “Post-” Conditions Shape the Tourism Experience

Background

Cartagena de Indias, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site whose tourism product is shaped by all three “post-” conditions in ways that create a culturally complex, economically consequential, and ethically challenging tourism landscape. With approximately 4.5 million visitors annually, the city's walled colonial centre (Ciudad Amurallada) has become one of Latin America's most celebrated tourism destinations – and one of its most contested.

Post-Colonial Cartagena

Cartagena was founded by Spanish colonisers in 1533 and became one of the most important ports in the Spanish Empire – a primary point of entry for enslaved Africans brought to the Americas and a fortified city built to protect the wealth extracted from South America. The colonial architecture that forms the core of the tourism product – the fortress walls, the grand churches, the merchant houses with their ironwork balconies and flowering courtyards – was built by enslaved and indigenous labour and funded by the colonial extraction of gold, silver, and human lives. The city's Afro-Colombian communities, descendants of enslaved people, historically lived within and around the walled city and contributed the musical, culinary, and cultural traditions (cumbia, champeta, coconut rice, fried fish, Palenque heritage) that form a distinctive element of the city's cultural identity. Tourism marketing for Cartagena overwhelmingly centres the colonial architecture, the romantic aesthetic of pastel-coloured walls and bougainvillea, and a Caribbean-escape narrative that frequently marginalises the Afro-Colombian experience. The city's most commercially valuable tourism encounters (luxury boutique hotels in restored colonial mansions, fine dining in colonial courtyards, horse-drawn

carriage rides through cobblestone streets) aestheticise the colonial built environment while rendering invisible the human suffering that created it.

Post-Industrial Cartagena

Cartagena's economy has undergone a post-industrial transition from its historical base in port trade, petrochemicals, and industrial activity to a service, tourism, and real estate economy. The conversion of the walled city from a mixed residential and commercial neighbourhood into a tourism and luxury real estate precinct mirrors the post-industrial urban transformation documented in European and North American cities: warehouses become boutique hotels, working-class homes become vacation rentals, local markets become food halls, and the daily commerce of a living community is replaced by the experience economy's curated offerings. The gentrification dynamic is acute: property values in the walled city have risen dramatically as international investors purchase colonial properties for conversion into hotels and rental accommodation, displacing long-term residents – predominantly Afro-Colombian and lower-income families – into peripheral neighbourhoods. The post-industrial logic of experience-based value creation has transformed the walled city from a living community into a heritage product, with the consequences for housing, community cohesion, and cultural vitality that this module has documented in cities worldwide.

Postmodern Cartagena

Cartagena's tourism product exhibits distinctively postmodern characteristics. The walled city functions simultaneously as a heritage site, a luxury real estate market, an Instagram backdrop, a culinary destination, a nightlife precinct, and a cruise ship excursion stop – the de-differentiation of tourism from property investment, from entertainment, from social media performance is complete. Visitors consume the city through social media lenses that aestheticise its colonial architecture without engaging with its colonial history; they photograph the colourful façades without knowing (or perhaps caring) that the beauty they are capturing was built by enslaved people; and they move between registers of historical education (visiting the Palace of the Inquisition or the San Pedro Claver Museum), sensory indulgence (a rooftop cocktail bar with a sunset view over the fortifications), and postmodern irony (acknowledging the tensions of consuming colonial beauty as leisure while choosing to enjoy the experience regardless). The postmodern tourist in Cartagena does not necessarily resolve the contradiction between aesthetic pleasure and historical awareness; they inhabit both simultaneously.

Discussion Questions

1. Apply each of the three “post-” concepts to Cartagena. What does each concept reveal about the city's tourism that the other two do not? Where do they converge, and where do they produce different insights?
2. Cartagena's tourism marketing aestheticises colonial architecture while marginalising Afro-Colombian heritage. Using post-colonial theory, evaluate whether this representational imbalance can be corrected through marketing reform, or whether it reflects a structural power asymmetry that marketing alone cannot address.
3. The gentrification of the walled city is displacing the Afro-Colombian communities whose cultural heritage contributes to the city's tourism appeal. Using both post-industrial and post-colonial analysis, explain why this displacement is occurring and propose governance interventions that could enable tourism-led regeneration without community displacement.
4. The postmodern tourist in Cartagena simultaneously enjoys colonial beauty and acknowledges colonial violence without resolving the contradiction. Is this postmodern comfort with contradiction ethically acceptable, or does it represent a failure of moral engagement that the tourism industry should address through more confrontational heritage interpretation?

5. If you were advising Cartagena's tourism authorities on a cultural strategy, how would you balance the three "post-" dimensions: the postmodern reality that visitors enjoy the city as spectacle and image, the post-industrial imperative that the city needs tourism revenue to replace declining industrial employment, and the post-colonial obligation to centre Afro-Colombian heritage, confront the history of enslavement honestly, and ensure that the communities whose culture enriches the tourism product share equitably in its benefits?

Summary

In this chapter you learnt about the changing nature of tourism.

Next, you addressed the changes in the nature of tourism, and then identified the issues experienced as a result of the changes.

You then showed critical knowledge on the impact towards the culture and society.

On completion of this chapter, you understood the concepts of postmodern, post-industrial and post-colonial in context of tourism.

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Chapter Three – Demonstrate knowledge in planning for tourism development

Introduction

In this chapter you will gain knowledge about planning for tourism development.

You will address the relationship tourism has with culture and society.

Next, you will understand the emerging trends in international policy towards tourism

On completion of this chapter, you will analyse how the trends support the plan for tourism development.

Learning Outcomes

On completing the chapter, you will be able to:

3. Demonstrate knowledge in planning for tourism development

Assessment Criteria

3.1 Address the relationship tourism has with culture and society

3.2 Explain the emerging trends in international policy towards tourism

3.3 Critically explain how the trends support the plan for tourism development

3.1 Address the relationship tourism has with culture and society

Introduction

This section serves as the integrative conclusion of the Culture and Society in Tourism module. Where previous sections identified trends, analysed them in organisational context, addressed structural changes, identified the issues those changes produce, and developed critical knowledge of cultural and societal impacts, this final section addresses the overarching question: what is the relationship between tourism, culture, and society – and how should it be managed?

The relationship is not one-directional. Tourism does not simply act upon culture and society; culture and society shape tourism in return. The relationship is bidirectional, dynamic, and deeply embedded in the power structures, economic systems, and value frameworks of the societies within which it operates. Addressing this relationship at the MBA level requires understanding both directions of influence, recognising the conditions under which the relationship is constructive versus destructive, and developing the strategic and ethical competency to manage the relationship in ways that serve cultural vitality, societal wellbeing, and commercial viability simultaneously.

1. How Culture and Society Shape Tourism

The first direction of the relationship – less frequently analysed but no less important – is the influence that culture and society exert on tourism itself.

Culture as the generator of tourism demand. The cultural values, social norms, and lifestyle practices of generating societies determine what kinds of tourism exist and who participates in them. The concept of the annual holiday is itself a cultural invention – the product of industrialisation, trade union campaigns for paid leave, and the cultural normalisation of leisure travel as a component of middle-class identity. Different cultures produce different travel motivations: the European tradition of the Grand Tour established cultural education as a travel motivation; the American road trip culture embodies values of freedom and frontier exploration; the Japanese concept of *tabi* (travel as spiritual journey) and the Islamic tradition of *hajj* (pilgrimage as religious obligation) frame travel through spiritual and devotional lenses; and the Chinese cultural emphasis on family togetherness shapes the concentration of domestic tourism during Golden Week holidays. Understanding that tourism demand is culturally constructed – not a universal human instinct expressed identically across cultures – is essential for hospitality managers who must design products and experiences for culturally diverse markets.

Social structures as determinants of tourism access. Social structures – income inequality, class systems, gender norms, age hierarchies, disability accommodation, and racial dynamics – determine who can participate in tourism and on what terms. Tourism has never been universally accessible: it has always been shaped by the inequalities of the societies that produce it. The historical exclusion of working-class populations from leisure travel was addressed, partially, by social tourism policies in post-war Europe and by the democratisation of air travel. But contemporary inequalities persist: passport privilege determines who can cross borders freely; income inequality determines who can afford international travel; gender norms in some societies restrict women's independent travel; disability barriers exclude people from many tourism experiences and destinations; and racial dynamics shape whose comfort, safety, and welcome are assured in tourism spaces and whose are not. Addressing the relationship between tourism and society means recognising that tourism is not separate from the inequalities of the society that produces it but is shaped by and often reproduces them.

Societal values as shapers of tourism governance. The policy frameworks, regulations, and governance structures through which tourism is managed reflect the cultural values and political priorities of the societies that create them. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework shapes a tourism policy that prioritises cultural preservation and visitor quality over visitor quantity. The Netherlands' tradition of pragmatic governance and citizen participation shapes Amsterdam's active tourism management approach. The neoliberal economic values dominant in some societies produce deregulatory, market-led tourism policies, while the communitarian values of others produce participatory, community-centred approaches. The critical insight is that tourism governance is never culturally neutral: it embodies the values, power relationships, and political priorities of the society that designs it, and understanding this cultural embeddedness is essential for anyone seeking to influence or work within tourism governance systems.

Technology culture as a transformer of travel behaviour. Contemporary digital culture – the social media imperative to document and share experiences, the expectation of seamless connectivity, the reliance on algorithmic recommendations, the normalisation of remote work – is reshaping travel behaviour in ways that the previous sections of this module have examined in detail. The critical point here is that these changes are not technologically determined; they are culturally mediated. Social media's influence on travel is not the product of the technology alone but of the cultural values (self-presentation, peer validation, status signalling, identity construction) that give social media its significance in people's lives. Understanding the cultural dimension of technology-mediated travel is essential because it reveals that the "problems" attributed to technology – overtourism driven by Instagram, housing crises driven by Airbnb, cultural homogenisation driven by algorithms – are ultimately cultural problems that technology amplifies and accelerates rather than creates.

2. How Tourism Shapes Culture and Society

The second direction – how tourism acts upon culture and society – has been the primary focus of this module and is summarised here through a framework that synthesises the analysis across all preceding sections.

Tourism as cultural preserver and reviver. At its most constructive, tourism creates economic incentives for the preservation, maintenance, and revival of cultural heritage that might otherwise decline. Historic buildings are restored because tourism generates revenue that justifies conservation investment. Traditional crafts, music, dance, and culinary traditions are sustained because tourism creates markets for cultural products and experiences. Languages, ceremonies, and knowledge systems are documented and transmitted to new generations because tourism demonstrates their value to external audiences and creates economic returns for their practitioners. UNESCO's World Heritage programme, the global heritage tourism industry, and the community-based cultural tourism enterprises examined throughout this programme all illustrate tourism's capacity to fund and motivate cultural preservation. The condition for this constructive influence is that the preservation is genuine – maintaining the living practice and its cultural meaning, not merely preserving the visual appearance while emptying the cultural substance.

Tourism as cultural transformer. Tourism inevitably transforms the cultures it engages with, and this transformation is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative but complex and context-dependent. The demonstration effect documented by anthropologists – where host communities adopt the consumption patterns, values, and behaviours of tourists – can be seen as cultural erosion (the loss of traditional identity) or as cultural agency (communities choosing to adopt practices they find desirable). The commercialisation of cultural practices can be seen as

commodification (the extraction of cultural value for commercial purposes) or as cultural entrepreneurship (communities using their cultural assets to generate economic opportunity). The social changes that tourism brings – new forms of employment, exposure to different worldviews, changes in gender roles, the development of new social networks – can be seen as disruption of traditional social structures or as liberation from constraining norms. The critical insight is that the same process of cultural transformation can be experienced positively by some community members and negatively by others, and that outsiders – including well-meaning academics, policy-makers, and MBA students – must be cautious about judging cultural change as inherently destructive without attending to the perspectives of the people experiencing it.

Tourism as generator of new cultural forms. Tourism does not merely preserve or transform existing cultures; it generates entirely new cultural forms that did not exist before the tourist encounter. The fusion cuisine that emerges when local culinary traditions engage with international visitor expectations is a new cultural form. The hybrid architectural styles of tourist-oriented districts – the rooftop bars of Marrakech, the beach clubs of Bali, the converted warehouse hotels of Berlin – represent new cultural expressions born from the intersection of local and global influences. The creative economies of tourist cities – the street art of Melbourne, the fashion scenes of Milan and Tokyo, the music cultures of Nashville and Havana – are sustained and energised by the international audiences that tourism brings. And the cross-cultural encounters facilitated by tourism generate new ideas, new relationships, and new cultural exchanges whose influence extends far beyond the tourism experience itself. The relationship between tourism and culture is not zero-sum: while tourism can erode existing cultural forms, it also generates new ones whose value and significance should not be dismissed.

Tourism as restructurer of social relations. Tourism restructures the social fabric of host communities in ways that extend beyond cultural practice into economic relationships, political dynamics, and community identity. The creation of a tourism economy generates new social hierarchies: those who own tourism assets (land, properties, businesses) gain economic power and social status; those who work in tourism occupy a new position as service providers whose livelihood depends on the satisfaction of visitors; and those who do not participate in the tourism economy may experience relative decline as the community's economic centre of gravity shifts toward tourism. The host-visitor relationship itself is a social relationship with power dynamics, emotional dimensions, and cultural negotiations that shape how both parties understand themselves and each other. In communities where tourism is the dominant economic activity, the social identity of the community may become inseparable from its role as a tourism destination – a transformation that is experienced as empowering by some (our culture is valued by the world) and alienating by others (we have become performers in our own home).

3. The Bidirectional Dynamic: Culture, Society, and Tourism as a Co-Evolving System

The most sophisticated understanding of the relationship treats culture, society, and tourism not as separate entities that influence each other in discrete, one-directional ways but as a co-evolving system in which changes in any element reshape the others in continuous feedback loops.

The co-evolution dynamic. Western consumer culture's shift toward experiential consumption (a societal change) drives demand for authentic cultural encounters (a tourism change), which generates economic incentives for cultural performance (a cultural change), which transforms the nature of cultural practice from spontaneous to commercial (a cultural change that feeds back

into the tourism product). Social media culture (a societal change) transforms how destinations are discovered and consumed (a tourism change), which concentrates demand at photogenic locations (a spatial change), which alters the character of those locations through commercial adaptation (a cultural change), which changes the social media content produced there (feeding back into the discovery system). Climate consciousness (a societal value shift) generates demand for sustainable tourism (a market change), which creates commercial incentives for greenwashing (an industry response), which produces consumer scepticism (a societal reaction), which drives demand for more credible sustainability credentials (a further market change). These feedback loops demonstrate that the relationship between tourism, culture, and society is not a simple cause-and-effect chain but a complex adaptive system in which interventions at any point produce consequences that ripple through the entire system in ways that may be unpredictable.

The power dimension. Throughout the co-evolving system, power determines whose culture is preserved and whose is transformed, whose society benefits and whose bears the costs, whose vision of tourism prevails and whose is marginalised. The power to define what counts as authentic culture lies with those who control tourism marketing, media representation, and algorithmic recommendation – not necessarily with the communities whose culture is being represented. The power to determine how tourism revenue is distributed lies with those who own assets, control distribution channels, and influence governance – not necessarily with the workers and communities who create the experience. And the power to shape the governance frameworks within which tourism operates lies with political decision-makers whose priorities may reflect commercial lobbying, national growth targets, and electoral considerations rather than the cultural wellbeing of host communities. Addressing the relationship between tourism, culture, and society honestly means acknowledging that this relationship is structured by power, and that making the relationship more constructive requires not merely better management but more equitable distribution of the power to decide.

Table 1. The Bidirectional Relationship Between Tourism, Culture, and Society

Direction	Mechanism	Example	Condition for Constructive Outcome
Culture shapes tourism demand	Cultural values, social norms, and lifestyle practices determine what kinds of tourism exist and who participates	European Grand Tour tradition; Japanese tabi; Chinese Golden Week family travel; wellness culture driving spa tourism	Hospitality organisations understand cultural diversity of demand rather than assuming universal preferences
Social structures shape tourism access	Income, class, gender, race, disability, and passport privilege determine who can travel and on what terms	Passport privilege; gender restrictions; disability exclusion; income barriers to international travel	Policy addresses structural barriers; industry designs accessible, inclusive products
Societal values shape tourism governance	Political and cultural values determine how tourism is regulated and managed	Bhutan's GNH-based policy; Amsterdam's participatory management; neoliberal deregulatory approaches	Governance reflects community values, not only commercial interests
Tourism preserves and revives culture	Economic incentives fund heritage conservation, traditional	UNESCO World Heritage sites; community craft	Preservation is genuine (living practice) not superficial (visual appearance only)

Direction	Mechanism	Example	Condition for Constructive Outcome
	arts, and cultural transmission	cooperatives; culinary heritage programmes	
Tourism transforms culture	Demonstration effect; commodification; new employment patterns; exposure to different worldviews	Traditional ceremonies adapted for tourists; young generations adopting visitor consumption patterns	Transformation is community-led; change is assessed from the perspective of those experiencing it
Tourism generates new cultural forms	Cross-cultural encounter creates fusion, innovation, and hybrid cultural expressions	Fusion cuisine; hybrid architecture; creative economies of tourist cities; new music and art scenes	New forms valued alongside traditional ones; creative diversity embraced
Tourism restructures social relations	New hierarchies, power dynamics, and community identities emerge around the tourism economy	Tourism asset owners gain status; workers become service providers; community identity tied to destination role	Benefits distributed equitably; community identity not reduced to tourism function
Co-evolution feedback loops	Changes in culture, society, and tourism feed back into each other in continuous cycles	Experience economy → authenticity demand → cultural performance → commodification → new demand patterns	Governance intervenes to manage feedback loops that produce destructive cycles

4. Managing the Relationship: Principles for Hospitality and Tourism Leaders

The module's analytical journey – from trend identification through organisational analysis, structural change, issue diagnosis, critical framework application, and now the integrative understanding of the bidirectional relationship – culminates in a set of principles for how hospitality and tourism leaders should manage the relationship between their industry and the cultures and societies it affects.

Principle 1: Cultural humility. Hospitality and tourism leaders must approach culture with humility rather than entitlement. Culture is not a resource to be exploited for commercial gain but a living system of meaning, identity, and social connection that deserves respect, understanding, and careful engagement. Cultural humility means listening to host communities before designing products that involve their culture, recognising the limits of one's own cultural understanding, accepting that communities have the right to refuse or restrict tourism's engagement with their cultural life, and approaching cross-cultural encounters with genuine curiosity rather than transactional purpose.

Principle 2: Reciprocity. The relationship between tourism and host cultures should be reciprocal rather than extractive. Tourism organisations that take from a culture – using its heritage, landscapes, traditions, and people as the raw material of the guest experience – have an obligation to give back in proportion. Reciprocity means ensuring that the economic benefits of cultural tourism flow to the cultural practitioners and communities whose heritage creates the value, that tourism contributes to the preservation and vitality of the cultures it engages with, and that the terms of cultural engagement are negotiated rather than imposed. The cultural justice

framework's three principles – recognition, distribution, and procedural justice – provide the evaluative criteria for assessing whether reciprocity is genuine.

Principle 3: Adaptive governance. The co-evolving nature of the tourism-culture-society relationship means that governance must be adaptive rather than static. Policies, regulations, and management frameworks that were appropriate for yesterday's tourism may be inadequate for tomorrow's. The structural changes documented in this module – platform disruption, AI mediation, dissolving boundaries, and contested purpose – demand governance innovation: real-time visitor management using data analytics, participatory governance that gives residents genuine voice, platform accountability that requires technology companies to share in the costs of the demand they generate, and cultural impact assessment as a standard component of tourism development approvals. Adaptive governance requires institutional humility – the willingness to acknowledge that current approaches are insufficient and to experiment with new ones – alongside the political courage to implement changes that may be opposed by those who benefit from the current system.

Principle 4: Long-term thinking. The cultural and societal consequences of tourism decisions frequently emerge over years or decades rather than quarters or fiscal years. The depopulation of Venice's and Dubrovnik's Old Towns, the erosion of neighbourhood character in Lisbon and Barcelona, and the transformation of Balinese water systems by resort development all represent cumulative consequences of decisions whose short-term commercial logic was compelling but whose long-term cultural and societal costs were devastating. Hospitality and tourism leaders must cultivate the capacity for long-term thinking: assessing how today's decisions will affect the cultural and societal fabric of the communities they operate within over the next decade, not just the next quarter. This requires metrics that capture cultural and societal health alongside financial performance, governance structures that give weight to future consequences, and a leadership culture that values stewardship of place alongside commercial achievement.

Principle 5: Honest engagement with complexity. The relationship between tourism, culture, and society is genuinely complex: it generates benefits and costs simultaneously, it affects different people differently, it evolves unpredictably, and it resists simple solutions. The temptation in both academic study and professional practice is to simplify this complexity into narratives that are easier to manage – tourism is a force for good, tourism is extractive, sustainability solves everything, degrowth is the answer. The most important principle for hospitality and tourism leaders is honest engagement with complexity: the willingness to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously, to acknowledge trade-offs rather than pretending they do not exist, to make decisions that are good enough rather than perfect, and to remain open to evidence that challenges assumptions. This is the competency that the Culture and Society in Tourism module has been designed to develop: not the possession of simple answers but the capacity to engage productively with questions that do not have simple answers.

Need to Know –

Addressing the relationship between tourism, culture, and society at the MBA level requires demonstrating integrative understanding across the entire module. Assessors expect you to: analyse the relationship as bidirectional (culture shapes tourism and tourism shapes culture), not one-directional; recognise the co-evolving, feedback-loop nature of the relationship rather than treating culture, society, and tourism as independent variables; engage with the power dimension (who decides, who benefits, who bears the cost); apply both the theoretical frameworks from the previous section and the practical principles from this section to specific cases; and demonstrate the capacity

for honest engagement with complexity – acknowledging trade-offs, holding multiple perspectives, and reaching justified positions rather than retreating into simplistic narratives. This is the capstone learning outcome: it integrates everything that precedes it and demands the highest level of analytical sophistication.

Did you know...?

The concept of “tourism culture” – the idea that tourism is itself a culture, with its own rituals, behaviours, symbols, and social norms – has been developed by anthropologists including Nelson Graburn and Dennison Nash. Graburn’s concept of tourism as a “sacred journey” draws parallels between the tourist trip and the ritual structure identified by anthropologist Victor Turner: separation (leaving home), liminality (the threshold state of being “betwixt and between” in an unfamiliar environment), and reincorporation (returning home changed by the experience). This anthropological framing suggests that tourism is not merely an economic activity that happens to affect culture but is itself a cultural practice with deep psychological and social functions: the human need for periodic renewal through encounter with the unfamiliar. If tourism is a cultural practice rather than merely an industry, then the relationship between tourism and culture is not between an external force and a passive recipient but between two cultural systems that interact, negotiate, and co-create the encounters through which both are transformed.

Industry Insight – Oaxaca, Mexico: The Bidirectional Relationship Between Tourism, Culture, and Society in a Living Cultural Capital

Oaxaca, a city of approximately 300,000 in southern Mexico and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, provides one of the most nuanced examples of the bidirectional relationship between tourism, culture, and society. Unlike destinations where tourism has overwhelmed local culture (Venice, Dubrovnik) or where tourism and culture exist in uneasy tension (Bali, Kyoto), Oaxaca represents a case where the relationship, while not without challenges, has demonstrated the potential for mutual enrichment – making it an instructive counterpoint to the predominantly cautionary cases examined elsewhere in this module.

How Oaxacan culture shapes its tourism. Oaxaca’s tourism is fundamentally shaped by its cultural distinctiveness. The city sits at the heart of one of Mexico’s most culturally diverse states, home to sixteen indigenous ethnolinguistic groups whose traditions in textile weaving, pottery (particularly the iconic black clay barro negro), mezcal production, culinary arts, and ceremonial practice have been maintained with extraordinary vitality. The Oaxacan culinary tradition – mole sauces requiring dozens of ingredients prepared over days, tlayudas, chapulines (grasshoppers), artisanal mezcal, and chocolate – has been recognised as among the world’s most significant food cultures, drawing culinary tourists, food writers, and professional chefs from across the globe. The Day of the Dead celebrations in Oaxaca are among Mexico’s most elaborate and authentic, attracting visitors who come to participate in a genuine cultural tradition rather than a tourist-staged event. The cultural depth and authenticity of Oaxacan traditions is the primary driver of tourism demand – the culture creates the tourism, not the other way around.

How tourism shapes Oaxacan culture. Tourism has revitalised and economically sustained cultural practices that might otherwise have declined. Young Oaxacans who might have migrated to Mexico City or the United States for employment can now earn livelihoods as artisans, chefs, mezcal producers, textile weavers, and cultural guides because tourism has created markets for their skills. The international recognition that tourism brings has generated cultural pride and renewed interest in

traditional practices among younger generations. The mezcal industry, which was in decline before tourism-driven demand revived it, has been transformed from a subsistence rural activity into a globally celebrated artisanal product that commands premium prices and supports thousands of rural livelihoods. Culinary tourism has funded the preservation of traditional recipes, seed varieties, and agricultural practices (milpa farming, the pre-Hispanic polyculture system) by creating economic value for the biodiversity and knowledge that these practices embody.

The co-evolution. Oaxaca's relationship between tourism and culture is co-evolutionary. Culinary tourism demand has driven chefs to research and revive ancestral recipes, which has deepened the cultural authenticity of the food offering, which has attracted more sophisticated culinary tourists, which has further increased the economic value of traditional food knowledge. The mezcal tourism economy has created incentives for sustainable agave cultivation and traditional production methods, which has preserved the ecological and cultural dimensions of mezcal production, which has enhanced the product's authenticity positioning in international markets. Textile tourism has connected Zapotec weaving communities directly with international buyers through cooperatives and studio visits, which has increased artisan incomes, which has funded the training of new weavers in traditional techniques, which has sustained the cultural practice. These positive feedback loops demonstrate that the tourism-culture relationship can be mutually reinforcing under the right conditions.

The challenges and tensions. Oaxaca's relationship is not without significant challenges that mirror the issues identified throughout this module. Gentrification is accelerating: international visitors, digital nomads, and foreign property buyers have driven up rents and property prices in the historic centre, displacing lower-income Oaxacan families. Cultural commodification pressures exist: the Day of the Dead celebrations have attracted visitor numbers that some community members feel compromise the spiritual and communal character of the tradition. The mezcal boom has created market pressures that incentivise faster, less traditional production methods. Foreign-owned restaurants and boutique hotels have established themselves in the centre, capturing tourism revenue that might otherwise flow to locally owned enterprises. And the indigenous communities whose cultural heritage underpins the tourism economy do not always capture a proportionate share of its economic benefit, raising the distributive justice concerns that the cultural justice framework identifies. Oaxaca's experience demonstrates that even a relatively constructive tourism-culture relationship requires active governance, community agency, and constant vigilance against the extractive dynamics that can transform cultural enrichment into cultural exploitation.

Oaxaca's case illustrates the central argument of this section: that the relationship between tourism and culture is not inherently constructive or destructive but depends on conditions that can be influenced through policy, governance, community agency, and the strategic choices of the organisations that operate within the tourism system. Where those conditions are present – cultural depth that drives demand, community ownership of cultural enterprise, governance that protects against displacement and extraction, and a tourism economy that rewards authenticity rather than standardisation – the relationship can be mutually enriching. Where they are absent, the same relationship produces the cultural erosion, displacement, and commodification documented elsewhere in this module.

Over to You – Capstone Activity

This capstone activity requires you to address the relationship between tourism, culture, and society by analysing a specific destination through the integrative framework developed in this module.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines the relationship between tourism and culture or society in a specific destination. Using the article as your evidence base, write an integrative analysis (approximately 800–1,000 words) structured as follows.

Suggested search terms: “tourism culture relationship destination” • “tourism cultural transformation” • “tourism society bidirectional” • “tourism cultural vitality” • “tourism heritage community” • “cultural tourism co-creation” • “tourism social change host community” • “tourism culture reciprocity”

Your analysis should address: (1) How culture and society shape tourism in the destination (demand generation, access structures, governance values, technology culture). (2) How tourism shapes culture and society (preservation, transformation, new cultural forms, restructured social relations). (3) The co-evolution dynamic: identify at least one positive feedback loop and one negative feedback loop operating in the case. (4) The power dimension: who controls the relationship and who benefits most? (5) A cultural justice assessment against the three principles (recognition, distributive, procedural). (6) Your management recommendations: applying the five principles from this section (cultural humility, reciprocity, adaptive governance, long-term thinking, honest engagement with complexity), propose three specific actions that would make the tourism-culture-society relationship more constructive in the destination you have examined.

Revision on the Go

- The relationship between tourism, culture, and society is bidirectional: culture shapes tourism (demand, access, governance, technology culture) and tourism shapes culture (preservation, transformation, new cultural forms, restructured social relations).
- Culture shapes tourism demand: the Grand Tour, tabi, hajj, Golden Week, wellness culture – different societies produce different travel motivations. Tourism demand is culturally constructed, not universal.
- Social structures shape tourism access: income, class, gender, race, disability, and passport privilege determine who travels and on what terms.
- Tourism’s cultural effects range from preservation and revival (heritage conservation, craft revitalisation) through transformation (demonstration effect, commodification) to generating entirely new cultural forms (fusion cuisine, hybrid architecture, creative economies).
- The co-evolution dynamic: culture, society, and tourism form a complex adaptive system with continuous feedback loops; changes in any element reshape the others.
- Power determines whose culture is preserved, whose is transformed, whose society benefits, and whose vision of tourism prevails. More constructive relationships require more equitable power distribution.
- Tourism is itself a culture (Graburn): a cultural practice with rituals, symbols, and social functions rooted in the human need for renewal through encounter with the unfamiliar.
- Five management principles: cultural humility, reciprocity, adaptive governance, long-term thinking, and honest engagement with complexity.
- The relationship is neither inherently constructive nor inherently destructive but depends on conditions: cultural depth, community ownership, governance that protects against displacement and extraction, and a tourism economy that rewards authenticity.

- The module's culminating insight: the most important competency is not possessing simple answers but the capacity to engage productively with questions that do not have simple answers.

Case Study – The Bidirectional Relationship Between Tourism, Culture, and Society in Marrakech, Morocco

Background

Marrakech, Morocco's fourth-largest city with approximately 1 million residents, is one of the world's most culturally intense tourism destinations. The UNESCO-listed medina (old walled city), the Jemaa el-Fna square recognised by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the souks (markets), the riads (traditional courtyard houses), the hammams (bathhouses), the Islamic architecture, and the Berber, Arab, and Andalusian cultural heritage that permeates every dimension of daily life create a tourism destination whose appeal is inseparable from its cultural identity. Marrakech attracted approximately 3 million international visitors in 2023, and tourism is the dominant economic activity in the medina and a significant contributor to the city's economy. The case illustrates the full complexity of the bidirectional relationship between tourism, culture, and society.

How Moroccan Culture Shapes Marrakech's Tourism

Marrakech's tourism product is created by its culture, not applied to it. The sensory intensity of the medina – the call to prayer, the scent of spices, the visual complexity of zellige tilework, the tactile experience of handwoven textiles, the taste of tagine and mint tea – is not staged for tourists but is the living environment of a functioning Islamic city whose cultural practices predate tourism by centuries. The riad accommodation model – traditional courtyard houses converted into intimate guesthouses – provides a form of cultural immersion that is architecturally authentic and domestically scaled, offering visitors the experience of inhabiting a Moroccan home rather than merely visiting one. The souk economy, where artisans produce leather goods, metalwork, ceramics, textiles, and woodwork using techniques passed through generations, provides genuine craft encounters that the authenticity trend has made commercially valuable. And Moroccan hospitality culture – in which generosity to guests is a religious and social obligation, and the sharing of food and tea is a ritual of welcome – creates a service culture that is culturally embedded rather than commercially trained.

How Tourism Shapes Marrakech's Culture and Society

Tourism has both sustained and transformed Marrakech's cultural fabric. Positively: tourism revenue has funded the restoration of historic riads, mosques, and public buildings that might otherwise have deteriorated. The international market for Moroccan artisanal products has sustained craft traditions that the industrialisation of manufacturing might have eliminated. The culinary tourism economy has elevated Moroccan cuisine to global prominence, generating pride and economic value for food traditions that had been undervalued domestically. And the hammam culture, which was declining among younger Moroccans, has been revitalised partly by tourist demand that has made traditional bathhouses economically viable again. Negatively: the riad conversion boom has transformed sections of the medina from residential neighbourhoods into tourism accommodation zones, displacing families and altering neighbourhood social dynamics. The souk economy has shifted from serving local consumer needs to serving tourist preferences, with some artisans producing simplified, lower-quality goods designed for tourist purchasing rather than the refined work that sustained the craft tradition's reputation. The Jemaa el-Fna square, where the oral storytelling tradition that UNESCO recognised has largely been replaced by tourist-oriented food stalls, snake charmers, and henna artists, illustrates the commodification dynamic at its most visible. And the employment of Moroccan women in riad hospitality, while economically empowering, operates within a cultural

context where the terms and conditions of that employment are shaped by gender norms that tourism has complicated but not resolved.

The Foreign Riad Owner Phenomenon

A distinctive feature of Marrakech's tourism-culture relationship is the significant presence of foreign riad owners – predominantly European and increasingly American buyers who have purchased, restored, and operate traditional courtyard houses as tourism accommodation. This phenomenon has generated complex and contested outcomes. Positively: foreign investment has funded the architectural restoration of hundreds of riads that might otherwise have collapsed, preserving an irreplaceable built heritage. Foreign owners have brought design sensibility, hospitality expertise, and international marketing capability that has elevated Marrakech's global positioning. Negatively: the transfer of property ownership from Moroccan families to foreign buyers raises distributive justice concerns – the economic appreciation of medina real estate benefits foreign investors while Moroccan residents are priced out of their own heritage neighbourhood. The aesthetic preferences of foreign owners sometimes impose European design sensibilities on Moroccan architectural traditions, creating hybrid interiors that satisfy tourist expectations but depart from authentic Moroccan domestic culture. And the governance of the riad tourism economy is influenced by the economic power of foreign property owners whose interests may not align with those of the Moroccan community within which they operate.

Discussion Questions

1. Using Table 1, map all eight dimensions of the bidirectional relationship between tourism, culture, and society as they manifest in Marrakech. Identify at least one positive and one negative feedback loop.
2. The foreign riad owner phenomenon simultaneously preserves architectural heritage and displaces Moroccan residents. Apply the cultural justice framework (recognition, distributive, procedural justice) to evaluate this phenomenon. Is it culturally constructive, destructive, or both?
3. UNESCO recognised the oral storytelling tradition of Jemaa el-Fna as intangible heritage, yet that tradition has been largely displaced by tourist-oriented commercial activity in the square. Using the commodification framework and the concept of cultural carrying capacity, analyse what has happened and what governance intervention could address it.
4. Compare Marrakech with Oaxaca (from the Industry Insight). Both are culturally rich destinations where tourism has both sustained and transformed local traditions. What conditions explain why Oaxaca's relationship appears more constructive, and what lessons could Marrakech draw from the comparison?
5. Apply all five management principles from this section (cultural humility, reciprocity, adaptive governance, long-term thinking, honest engagement with complexity) to Marrakech. For each principle, propose one specific action that would make the tourism-culture-society relationship more constructive.

3.2 Explain the emerging trends in international policy towards tourism

Introduction

The structural changes in tourism's nature, the issues those changes produce, and the evolving relationship between tourism, culture, and society examined throughout this module have collectively created a new international policy landscape. Governments, international organisations, and multilateral bodies are responding to the cultural and societal consequences of tourism with policy frameworks that depart significantly from the growth-oriented, market-led approaches that dominated the pre-pandemic era. This section explains the seven most significant emerging trends in international policy towards tourism, analysing the cultural and societal forces driving each, the policy mechanisms being deployed, and the implications for hospitality and tourism organisations.

At the MBA level, explaining these policy trends requires understanding not only what policies are emerging but why they are emerging now – connecting policy developments to the cultural shifts, societal pressures, and governance challenges that this module has examined – and assessing their likely consequences for the organisations and destinations within which students will build their careers.

1. The Post-Pandemic Policy Reset: From “Recover Volume” to “Rebuild Better”

The policy trend. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented opportunity for tourism policy to be reimaged rather than merely restored. A significant number of destinations and national governments have used the pandemic disruption not simply to recover pre-pandemic visitor volumes but to redesign their tourism models. The dominant emerging policy framework is “value over volume” – the principle that tourism success should be measured by the quality and sustainability of the visitor economy rather than by the number of arrivals. This represents a fundamental shift in the metric of success that drives international tourism policy, from the UNWTO's traditional barometer of “international tourist arrivals” toward measures of economic value per visitor, local economic retention, environmental impact per guest-night, employment quality, and resident satisfaction.

Policy examples. New Zealand's Tourism Industry Transformation Plan, examined in detail earlier in this programme, is the most comprehensive example: it explicitly rejects pre-pandemic growth targets and establishes sustainability, Māori self-determination, worker wellbeing, and community benefit as co-equal policy objectives alongside economic performance. Spain's Tourism Sustainability Strategy 2030 repositions Spanish tourism from volume competition toward value creation, digital transformation, and territorial balance. Thailand's post-COVID recovery strategy targets higher-spending visitors and creative economy tourism rather than reinstating mass-market volume targets. Iceland's tourism policy has shifted from the aggressive marketing that drove arrivals from 300,000 to over 2 million in a decade toward demand management, visitor dispersal, and infrastructure investment designed to protect the natural assets that generate tourism demand. And several Caribbean SIDS have used the pandemic disruption to develop digital nomad visa programmes, attracting long-staying, high-spending remote workers whose economic contribution per visit far exceeds that of traditional short-stay tourists.

The cultural and societal driver. The post-pandemic policy reset reflects the fracturing of the growth consensus examined in this module. Communities that experienced the relief of tourism's

absence during lockdowns – cleaner air, quieter streets, recovered neighbourhoods, reduced congestion – are no longer willing to accept unconditional return to pre-pandemic pressure. The pandemic demonstrated that tourism-dependent economies without diversification, social protection, or fiscal reserves are devastatingly fragile, creating political demand for more resilient models. And the global conversation about “building back better” provided institutional legitimacy for policy-makers to challenge assumptions that had been politically unassailable before the pandemic.

2. Climate Governance and the Decarbonisation Imperative

The policy trend. Climate governance is emerging as the most consequential international policy force affecting tourism’s future. The Paris Agreement’s carbon reduction commitments, the EU’s Fit for 55 package, ICAO’s CORSIA scheme for international aviation, and national carbon taxation policies are collectively creating a regulatory environment in which the carbon cost of tourism will progressively increase. The policy mechanisms include: mandatory emissions reporting for aviation and hospitality; carbon taxation and emissions trading that raise the cost of carbon-intensive travel; sustainable aviation fuel mandates that require airlines to blend an increasing proportion of low-carbon fuel; building energy performance standards that require hotels and resorts to meet decarbonisation targets; and climate adaptation funding that channels resources toward destinations most vulnerable to climate impacts.

The EU Green Deal’s tourism implications. The European Union’s Green Deal is emerging as the most comprehensive regulatory framework affecting international tourism. The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) now covers intra-European aviation, increasing the cost of short-haul flights within Europe. The proposed extension to all flights departing EU airports would significantly affect the cost structure of international tourism to and from Europe. The EU Taxonomy Regulation establishes criteria for what qualifies as a “sustainable” economic activity, with implications for which tourism investments can access green finance and which cannot. The Green Claims Directive will require businesses – including hospitality operators – to substantiate environmental claims with verified evidence, directly addressing the greenwashing problem identified in this module. And the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) requires large companies, including major hotel chains operating in Europe, to report detailed environmental, social, and governance data – creating transparency that enables consumers, investors, and regulators to assess sustainability performance. For hospitality organisations operating in or serving European markets, the EU Green Deal represents the most significant regulatory change in a generation.

3. Platform Regulation and the Digital Services Framework

The policy trend. The governance deficit identified in this module – the mismatch between the power of global technology platforms and the capacity of local and national governments to regulate them – is beginning to be addressed through emerging regulatory frameworks. The most advanced is the EU’s Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA), which establish rules for large online platforms including requirements for transparency in algorithmic ranking, obligations to cooperate with regulators, restrictions on anti-competitive practices, and accountability for content and services facilitated through their platforms.

Tourism-specific platform regulation. Beyond general digital regulation, tourism-specific platform regulation is emerging at national and municipal levels. Short-term rental registration

requirements have been adopted across the EU following a 2022 European Commission proposal for a harmonised framework requiring platforms to share host data with national authorities. This regulation directly addresses the housing crisis documented in this module by enabling local governments to enforce rental restrictions that were previously unenforceable because platforms refused to share host identity and listing data. Several cities have gone further: Barcelona has announced plans to eliminate all short-term tourist rental apartments by 2028, representing the most radical platform regulation intervention in any major tourism city. At the national level, France's Elan Law restricts short-term rentals to 120 days per year for primary residences in Paris, with platforms required to block listings that exceed the limit. Japan's Minpaku Law requires all short-term rental hosts to register with local authorities and limits operations to 180 days per year. These regulations represent a decisive shift in international policy from the laissez-faire approach to platform-mediated tourism that characterised the 2010s toward active governance of platform impacts on housing, communities, and cultural life.

4. Visitor Management and Demand Shaping as Mainstream Policy

The policy trend. Visitor management – the active governance of visitor numbers, flows, behaviour, and spatial distribution within a destination – has evolved from a niche conservation tool into a mainstream international policy approach adopted by major cities, heritage sites, and natural areas worldwide. The shift represents a fundamental change from tourism policy as promotion (attracting visitors) to tourism policy as management (governing the visitors that arrive). Policy mechanisms include: entry fees and visitor levies (Venice's day-tripper charge, Bhutan's Sustainable Development Fee, Bali's tourist levy, Iceland's tourist tax); timed entry and reservation systems (Machu Picchu, the Alhambra, Mount Fuji, Cinque Terre, the Uffizi Gallery); visitor caps and quotas (Galápagos, Komodo Island, Maya Bay in Thailand); real-time crowd management using technology (CCTV visitor counting at Dubrovnik's Old Town gates, Kyoto's congestion monitoring, Amsterdam's visitor flow sensors); demand dispersal strategies that redirect visitors to less-congested areas and time periods; and behavioural regulation including fines for sitting on historic steps (Rome, Florence), photography restrictions (Gion in Kyoto), and dress code enforcement at religious sites.

The cultural and societal driver. The mainstreaming of visitor management reflects the politicisation of tourism documented throughout this module. Residents in overtouristed destinations have demanded that their governments manage tourism rather than merely promote it, and the political cost of failing to respond to resident anger has made visitor management a political necessity in many cities. The cultural carrying capacity concept – the recognition that destinations have limits beyond which tourism degrades rather than enhances community life – has moved from academic discourse into policy practice. And the COVID-19 pandemic normalised the concept of managing access to public spaces: timed entry, capacity limits, and reservation systems that would have seemed intrusive before 2020 are now accepted as routine governance tools.

5. Cultural Rights, Indigenous Self-Determination, and Heritage Governance

The policy trend. An emerging trend in international policy is the recognition that communities have cultural rights in relation to tourism – rights that include the right to determine how their culture is represented and consumed, the right to benefit equitably from the use of their cultural heritage, and the right to participate meaningfully in governance decisions that affect their

cultural life. This trend draws on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which establishes indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, cultural integrity, and free, prior, and informed consent over developments affecting their territories and heritage. While UNDRIP applies specifically to indigenous peoples, the principles it establishes are increasingly being extended to other communities whose cultural heritage is affected by tourism.

Policy manifestations. New Zealand's Tourism Industry Transformation Plan explicitly centres Māori self-determination as a pillar of tourism governance, establishing that Māori communities must have authority over how their cultural heritage is used in tourism and must receive equitable benefit from that use. Australia has developed national guidelines for respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage in tourism, requiring operators to obtain community consent before incorporating indigenous cultural content into tourism products. Several Canadian provinces have established indigenous tourism governance bodies that control the terms on which indigenous cultural tourism is developed and marketed. At the international level, UNESCO's evolving approach to intangible cultural heritage recognises the risk that tourism-driven commodification poses to living traditions and has developed guidelines for sustainable tourism at cultural heritage sites that emphasise community participation and cultural integrity. The UNWTO's Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics establishes principles of cultural respect, though its implementation remains voluntary.

The cultural and societal driver. This policy trend reflects the broader movement toward recognition justice and procedural justice analysed in this module. The post-colonial critique of tourism – the argument that the global tourism system extracts cultural value from host communities without adequate recognition, compensation, or consent – has gained institutional traction. The visible harm of cultural commodification documented in destinations from Bali to Gion, from Dubrovnik to the Maasai Mara, has created political demand for frameworks that protect cultural integrity. And the growing political voice of indigenous peoples and heritage communities worldwide has made cultural self-determination a governance issue that tourism policy can no longer ignore.

6. Labour Standards and the Decent Work Agenda in Tourism

The policy trend. The post-pandemic labour crisis in hospitality – characterised by workforce shortages, low retention, and the public exposure of poor working conditions – has accelerated policy attention to labour standards and decent work within the tourism sector. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda (aligned with SDG 8) provides the normative framework, and several jurisdictions are translating its principles into specific tourism and hospitality regulations. Policy mechanisms include: minimum wage increases targeted at or affecting the hospitality sector; restrictions on exploitative zero-hours and on-call contracts; mandatory tipping transparency and fair distribution; supply chain due diligence requirements that hold hospitality companies accountable for labour conditions across their procurement networks; modern slavery reporting obligations for large hospitality companies; and investment in tourism and hospitality education and training as a pathway to professionalising the workforce and improving career attractiveness.

The EU's influence. The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) will require large companies, including international hotel groups operating in Europe, to identify, prevent, and mitigate adverse human rights and environmental impacts across their value chains. For hospitality organisations with complex, multi-tier supply chains spanning food procurement, laundry services, cleaning contracts, and construction, this directive represents a significant new compliance obligation that extends labour accountability beyond direct employees to encompass the entire operational ecosystem. The EU's proposed Platform Work Directive,

which establishes criteria for determining whether platform workers are employees or independent contractors, has direct implications for the gig economy dimension of tourism labour – including platform-mediated tour guides, freelance experience hosts, and on-demand hospitality workers.

7. AI Governance and the Regulation of Algorithmic Tourism Mediation

The policy trend. The most nascent but potentially most consequential emerging policy trend is the governance of artificial intelligence as it increasingly mediates tourism discovery, planning, booking, and on-trip experience. The EU AI Act, the world's first comprehensive AI regulatory framework, classifies AI systems by risk level and imposes transparency, accountability, and human oversight requirements on high-impact AI applications. While tourism-specific AI applications are not classified as high-risk under the current framework, the principles established by the EU AI Act – transparency about when consumers are interacting with AI, accountability for AI-generated recommendations, and the right to human intervention – are likely to be extended to tourism applications as AI's role in travel planning becomes more prominent.

Tourism-specific AI policy implications. The algorithmic power problem documented in this module – where AI recommendation systems concentrate demand at popular destinations while rendering less-visited alternatives invisible, and where opaque algorithms determine which businesses receive visibility and which do not – is beginning to attract policy attention. The OECD's Principles on Artificial Intelligence, adopted by over 40 countries, establish principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness that policy-makers may apply to the AI systems that increasingly mediate tourism. Specific policy questions that are emerging include: should AI travel planning systems be required to disclose when recommendations are influenced by commercial relationships? Should destinations have the right to input into how they are represented by AI systems? Should AI-powered dynamic pricing in hospitality be subject to transparency requirements? And should the training data used by AI travel planners be required to represent destinations equitably rather than amplifying existing demand concentrations? These questions are at the frontier of tourism policy – no jurisdiction has yet developed comprehensive answers – but they will define the governance landscape within which the next generation of hospitality and tourism leaders will operate.

Table 1. Emerging Trends in International Tourism Policy

Policy Trend	Key Mechanism	Cultural/Societal Driver	Implication for Organisations
Post-pandemic policy reset	Value-over-volume metrics; quality-focused recovery strategies; resilience building	Fracturing of growth consensus; resident demand for managed tourism; pandemic-exposed fragility	Organisations measured on value generated, not just volume delivered; diversification required
Climate governance	Carbon taxation; SAF mandates; ETS for aviation; Green Claims Directive; CSRD reporting	Climate crisis urgency; Paris Agreement commitments; EU Green Deal regulatory ambition	Carbon costs rising; greenwashing legally risky; sustainability reporting mandatory for large groups
Platform regulation	STR registration; data-sharing mandates; rental day	Housing crisis; community displacement; governance	STR operators face compliance costs; platforms must share data; enforcement intensifying

Policy Trend	Key Mechanism	Cultural/Societal Driver	Implication for Organisations
	limits; DSA/DMA for tech platforms	deficit vis-à-vis global platforms	
Visitor management	Entry fees; timed entry; visitor caps; real-time crowd management; behavioural regulation	Overtourism politicisation; cultural carrying capacity; pandemic normalisation of access management	Capacity limits constrain growth models; reservation systems change distribution dynamics
Cultural rights / indigenous self-determination	UNDRIP implementation; FPIC requirements; cultural heritage governance; benefit-sharing mandates	Post-colonial critique; cultural justice demands; indigenous political voice; UNESCO heritage guidance	Cultural content requires community consent; benefit-sharing obligations; authenticity as compliance issue
Labour and decent work	Minimum wage; contract regulation; supply chain due diligence; modern slavery reporting	Post-pandemic labour shortages; public awareness of exploitation; SDG 8; EU CSDDD and Platform Work Directive	Compliance costs rising; workforce investment required; supply chain accountability expanding
AI governance	EU AI Act; transparency requirements; accountability for algorithmic recommendations	Algorithmic power concentration; opaque recommendation systems; demand concentration by AI	AI recommendation visibility matters; disclosure obligations emerging; training data equity questions

Need to Know –

Explaining emerging trends in international tourism policy at the MBA level requires more than listing new regulations. Assessors expect you to: connect each policy trend to the cultural and societal forces driving it (the trends examined throughout this module); explain the specific policy mechanisms being deployed and how they work; assess the implications for hospitality and tourism organisations (compliance requirements, strategic opportunities, competitive consequences); critically evaluate whether the policies are likely to be effective in addressing the issues they target; and recognise the tensions and trade-offs within the emerging policy landscape (climate governance increases travel costs in ways that may reduce tourism to developing countries; platform regulation may reduce housing supply while increasing accommodation costs; visitor management may protect cultural assets while threatening tourism-dependent livelihoods). The strongest work recognises that these seven policy trends interact – climate governance reinforces the value-over-volume reset; platform regulation enables visitor management; cultural rights frameworks inform labour standards – and analyses them as a connected system rather than independent developments.

Did you know...?

Barcelona's announcement in 2024 that it would eliminate all 10,101 licensed tourist rental apartments by 2028 represents the most radical platform regulation intervention in any major global

tourism city. The policy, driven by a housing crisis in which average rents in Barcelona increased by over 60 per cent in a decade while average wages rose by less than 20 per cent, reflects the city government's assessment that the housing market cannot accommodate both residents and tourists at current volumes and that, when forced to choose, the right of residents to affordable housing must take precedence over the right of property owners to maximise income through tourist rentals. If implemented as announced, the policy would remove thousands of apartments from the tourist accommodation market and return them to the long-term residential rental supply. The policy has been celebrated by housing activists and criticised by property owners, tourism industry representatives, and economists who argue that reducing tourist accommodation supply will increase hotel prices without resolving the structural housing shortage. Barcelona's experiment will be closely watched by cities worldwide as a test case for whether the most aggressive form of platform regulation can address the tourism-housing crisis without producing unacceptable economic and tourism consequences.

Industry Insight – How the EU's Regulatory Revolution is Reshaping International Tourism Policy

The European Union has emerged as the world's most consequential regulatory force in international tourism policy – not through a dedicated tourism regulation (the EU has limited formal competence over tourism) but through the cumulative impact of its environmental, digital, labour, consumer protection, and sustainability regulations that collectively reshape the operating environment for every tourism organisation that serves, operates within, or transits through EU member states. The “Brussels Effect” – the phenomenon by which EU regulations become de facto global standards because of the size and importance of the European market – means that EU policy trends are effectively international policy trends.

The environmental regulatory stack. The EU's environmental regulations affecting tourism form a layered system. The Emissions Trading System covers intra-European aviation emissions, with expansion to all departing flights under consideration. The Fit for 55 package mandates a 55 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, requiring every sector including hospitality to decarbonise. The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive sets minimum energy efficiency standards that hotels and resorts must meet, requiring renovation investment for properties that fall below thresholds. The Taxonomy Regulation defines which economic activities qualify as environmentally sustainable, determining access to green finance and investment – a classification that increasingly affects which hotel developments can secure favourable financing terms. And the Green Claims Directive will require every environmental claim made in marketing to be substantiated with verified evidence, creating legal risk for the greenwashing that has been endemic in hospitality marketing. For hotel groups operating in Europe, this regulatory stack creates a compliance environment in which environmental performance is not optional but legally mandated, financially consequential, and publicly reportable.

The digital regulatory stack. The EU's digital regulations create a parallel compliance environment for the technology dimension of tourism. The Digital Services Act requires large online platforms to be transparent about their content moderation, algorithmic ranking, and advertising practices. The Digital Markets Act designates the largest platforms as “gatekeepers” subject to special obligations including interoperability and fair access requirements – potentially affecting how platforms like Booking.com and Airbnb interact with hotel direct booking systems. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) governs how tourism businesses collect, process, and use guest data – a significant compliance consideration for AI-powered personalisation systems that depend on processing large volumes of personal data. The EU AI Act establishes transparency and accountability requirements for AI systems, with implications for the AI-powered recommendation, pricing, and service delivery

systems that hospitality organisations are increasingly deploying. And the proposed Short-Term Rental Regulation will require platforms to share host registration data with national authorities across all EU member states, enabling uniform enforcement of short-term rental restrictions.

The social and labour regulatory stack. The EU's social regulations add a third compliance dimension. The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive requires large companies to report detailed social and governance data including workforce conditions, pay equity, and diversity metrics. The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive extends accountability across entire supply chains, requiring companies to identify, prevent, and mitigate adverse human rights impacts in their procurement networks. The Platform Work Directive establishes criteria for determining the employment status of platform workers, with implications for gig-economy tourism labour. And the European Accessibility Act establishes accessibility requirements for products and services including hospitality and transport, creating compliance obligations for tourism organisations serving European consumers.

The Brussels Effect on global tourism. The cumulative impact of these regulatory stacks extends far beyond Europe's borders. International hotel groups like Marriott, Hilton, IHG, and Accor must comply with EU regulations across their European portfolios but frequently adopt EU standards globally because maintaining dual operating standards – one for Europe and one for everywhere else – is more complex and costly than applying the higher standard universally. Airlines serving EU routes must comply with emissions regulations that affect their global network economics. Technology platforms regulated by the DSA, DMA, and AI Act in Europe often extend compliance measures globally because designing separate systems for different jurisdictions is technically impractical. And consumers worldwide are increasingly influenced by the standards and expectations that EU regulation establishes, creating market demand for sustainability, transparency, and accountability that extends beyond the jurisdictions where compliance is legally required. The practical implication for MBA students is that EU tourism-relevant regulation is, functionally, the emerging standard for international tourism policy – and understanding its requirements is essential regardless of where in the world one intends to work.

The EU's regulatory revolution illustrates the central argument of this section: that emerging international policy towards tourism is driven not by tourism-specific legislation but by the convergence of environmental, digital, social, and governance regulations that collectively reshape the conditions within which tourism operates. For hospitality and tourism leaders, understanding this regulatory landscape is no longer optional – it is a core strategic competency that determines which organisations can operate, compete, and thrive in the policy environment that is taking shape.

Over to You – Activity

This activity requires you to analyse an emerging international tourism policy trend and assess its implications for a specific hospitality or tourism organisation, supported by academic evidence.

Task: Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines an emerging policy development affecting international tourism. Suitable articles might examine: post-pandemic tourism policy resets, climate regulation and aviation, short-term rental regulation, visitor management and overtourism policy, indigenous rights in tourism governance, labour standards in hospitality, or AI governance implications for tourism.

Suggested search terms: “post-pandemic tourism policy reset” • “tourism climate regulation” • “short-term rental regulation Airbnb policy” • “overtourism visitor management policy” • “indigenous tourism governance rights” • “hospitality labour regulation decent work” • “AI tourism governance” • “EU tourism regulation sustainability” • “tourism policy value over volume”

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the policy trend examined and the jurisdiction or international context. Connect the policy to the cultural and societal forces driving it, drawing on concepts from this module. Assess the specific implications for a hospitality or tourism organisation of your choice: what compliance requirements does the policy create? What strategic opportunities or threats does it generate? How should the organisation respond? Consider whether the policy is likely to achieve its stated objectives or whether implementation challenges, unintended consequences, or industry resistance will limit its effectiveness. Conclude with a reflection on how the policy trend connects to at least one other emerging trend from this section and what the convergence of multiple regulatory trends means for the future operating environment of international tourism.

Revision on the Go

- Seven emerging trends in international tourism policy: post-pandemic reset, climate governance, platform regulation, visitor management, cultural rights, labour standards, and AI governance.
- Post-pandemic reset: “value over volume” replacing growth-at-all-costs; NZ Tourism ITP, Spain 2030, Iceland demand management, Caribbean digital nomad visas.
- Climate governance: EU ETS for aviation, Fit for 55, SAF mandates, Green Claims Directive (substantiation required), CSRD (mandatory sustainability reporting). Carbon cost of tourism rising.
- Platform regulation: EU STR data-sharing proposal, Barcelona eliminating 10,101 tourist apartments by 2028, France 120-day limit, Japan 180-day limit. Shift from laissez-faire to active governance.
- Visitor management mainstreamed: Venice entry fee, Machu Picchu timed entry, Mount Fuji reservation, Dubrovnik CCTV counting, Amsterdam flow sensors, Rome sitting fines. Pandemic normalised access management.
- Cultural rights: UNDRIP and FPIC principles extending to tourism; NZ Māori self-determination in Tourism ITP; Australian indigenous tourism guidelines; UNESCO intangible heritage guidance.
- Labour standards: ILO Decent Work Agenda; EU CSDDD (supply chain human rights due diligence); Platform Work Directive (employment status); modern slavery reporting.
- AI governance: EU AI Act (transparency, accountability, human oversight); emerging questions about AI recommendation disclosure, destination representation, and training data equity.
- The Brussels Effect: EU regulations become de facto global standards because international hotel groups, airlines, and platforms apply EU compliance measures worldwide rather than maintaining dual standards.
- Policy trends interact and reinforce: climate governance supports the value-over-volume reset; platform regulation enables visitor management; cultural rights inform labour standards. Analyse as a connected system.

Case Study – Navigating the Emerging Policy Landscape: How a European Hotel Group Prepares for the Regulatory Revolution

Background

The Adriatic Hospitality Group (AHG) is a fictional mid-sized European hotel company operating 28 properties across Croatia, Montenegro, Greece, Italy, and Spain. The portfolio spans four-star city hotels, coastal resorts, and a small collection of heritage properties in historic centres. The group employs approximately 3,200 people during peak season and 1,800 year-round. Revenue is

generated primarily from Northern European leisure travellers (65%), Mediterranean domestic tourism (20%), and business/conference travel (15%). The group is privately owned by a Croatian family and generates approximately €180 million in annual revenue.

The CEO has asked the strategy team to assess the implications of emerging international tourism policy trends for the group's five-year strategy. The assessment must cover all seven policy trends examined in this section and produce specific recommendations for strategic, operational, and compliance response.

Your Task

1. Post-pandemic policy reset: AHG's five Mediterranean destinations are all pursuing value-over-volume strategies post-pandemic. How should the group reposition to align with host-country policy priorities that increasingly favour fewer, higher-spending visitors over volume? What metrics should replace traditional occupancy and arrival targets?
2. Climate governance: The EU's environmental regulatory stack – ETS, Fit for 55, Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, Green Claims Directive, CSRD – will affect AHG across multiple dimensions. Conduct a preliminary climate compliance assessment: which properties are most exposed to energy performance requirements? What investment in decarbonisation is needed? How should marketing claims be adjusted to comply with the Green Claims Directive?
3. Platform regulation: Several of AHG's city-centre properties compete with short-term rental apartments for the same guest segments. How will tightening STR regulation in Barcelona, Italy, and Greece affect AHG's competitive position? Is this an opportunity (reduced competition from STRs) or a threat (reduced overall accommodation supply may reduce destination attractiveness)?
4. Visitor management: Dubrovnik, Venice, Santorini, and Barcelona – destinations where AHG operates or from which it draws guests – are all implementing visitor management restrictions. How do entry fees, timed entry systems, and visitor caps affect AHG's operations and guest experience? How should the group adapt its guest communication, booking processes, and activity programming to a managed-access environment?
5. Cultural rights: AHG's heritage properties in historic centres and its cultural tourism programming involve engagement with local cultural heritage. How should the group ensure that its cultural content respects community rights, involves genuine community participation, and distributes benefits equitably – particularly in destinations where the cultural heritage governance frameworks are becoming more demanding?
6. Labour standards: With 3,200 peak-season employees across five countries, AHG faces compliance obligations under multiple national labour frameworks and the emerging EU CSDDD. Assess the group's exposure to the decent work agenda. What changes to employment contracts, supply chain procurement, and workforce development are needed to ensure compliance and to attract talent in a competitive labour market?
7. AI governance: AHG is considering deploying AI-powered personalisation, dynamic pricing, and chatbot guest communication. What transparency and accountability requirements does the EU AI Act create for these applications? How should the group balance AI efficiency with the human hospitality that its cultural positioning promises?
8. Integrated strategy: Based on your analysis of all seven policy trends, develop an integrated five-year strategic recommendation for AHG. Which trends represent the greatest strategic risk? Which create the most significant competitive opportunities? How can the group transform regulatory compliance from a cost burden into a source of differentiation and competitive advantage?

3.3 Critically explain how the trends support the plan for tourism development

Introduction

This final section of **The Culture and Society in Tourism** module brings together every analytical strand developed across the preceding sections and applies them to their ultimate practical purpose: the development of tourism plans that are informed by, aligned with, and supported by the cultural, societal, and policy trends shaping the contemporary tourism landscape. Where earlier sections identified trends, analysed their organisational implications, examined structural changes, diagnosed issues, applied critical frameworks, addressed the tourism-culture relationship, and explained emerging policy directions, this section integrates all of that work into a methodology for culturally intelligent tourism development planning.

At the MBA level, critically explaining how trends support tourism development planning requires demonstrating that you can translate cultural and societal analysis into strategic action – showing not merely that you understand trends but that you can use them as the foundation for development plans that are commercially viable, culturally sensitive, socially equitable, environmentally responsible, and aligned with the regulatory environment. This is the competency that distinguishes the culturally intelligent hospitality leader from one who simply follows market data.

1. The Logic of Trend-Supported Development Planning

Tourism development planning has traditionally been driven by supply-side analysis (what assets does this destination have?), demand-side projection (how many visitors can we attract?), and financial modelling (will the investment generate an adequate return?). While these elements remain necessary, they are no longer sufficient. The cultural and societal analysis developed in this module adds a fourth dimension: trend alignment, which asks whether the proposed development is positioned to benefit from, rather than be disrupted by, the cultural, societal, and policy forces shaping tourism's evolution.

Trends as tailwinds and headwinds. Cultural and societal trends function as either tailwinds (forces that accelerate a development's success) or headwinds (forces that impede it). A wellness resort development benefits from the wellness trend as a tailwind: growing consumer demand for wellbeing experiences creates a market that the development is designed to serve. Conversely, a large-scale mass-market beach resort development faces the conscious travel, value-over-volume, and visitor management trends as headwinds: the policy and market environment is moving away from the high-volume, low-value model that the development represents. The most successful tourism development plans are those that align with trends functioning as tailwinds while managing or avoiding those functioning as headwinds. This alignment is not coincidental; it must be deliberately designed into the development plan through the analytical process this module has developed.

Trends as validation for development choices. When presenting a tourism development plan to investors, government agencies, development partners, or community stakeholders, trends provide external validation for strategic choices. A proposal to develop a community-owned culinary tourism enterprise is strengthened by citing the culinary tourism trend, the authenticity trend, the conscious travel trend, the local supply chain development evidence, and the cultural

rights policy trend – collectively demonstrating that the proposed development is aligned with the direction of travel in consumer demand, cultural values, and regulatory frameworks. This trend-based justification is more persuasive than financial projections alone because it addresses the why behind the numbers: it explains the structural forces that will sustain demand for the development over the medium and long term rather than merely extrapolating from current visitor data.

Trends as risk indicators. Trends also function as risk indicators for development plans. A proposed hotel development in a destination where the housing crisis is severe and platform regulation is tightening faces regulatory risk. A tourism development that depends on high-volume, low-cost air connectivity faces climate governance risk as carbon costs increase. A development that commodifies local culture without community consent faces cultural rights and reputational risk. A development that treats labour as a cost to minimise rather than a capability to invest in faces workforce risk in a post-pandemic labour market. Trend analysis identifies these risks before they materialise, enabling the development plan to incorporate mitigation measures or, in extreme cases, to redirect the investment toward a model that is more aligned with the trend environment.

2. A Framework for Trend-Supported Tourism Development Planning

The following six-step framework integrates the analytical tools from this module into a structured development planning process. Each step draws on specific module content and produces a specific planning output.

Step 1: Cultural and societal context analysis. Before designing any tourism development, analyse the cultural and societal context of the destination using the concepts from this module. What is the destination's cultural identity and what are its most distinctive cultural assets? What is the current relationship between tourism and the host community – is the social exchange perceived as fair, or is tourism generating antagonism? What cultural carrying capacity exists, and how close is the destination to its threshold? What is the community's level of agency over tourism decisions? This step uses the tourist gaze, commodification, social exchange, cultural carrying capacity, and cultural justice frameworks to produce a cultural context assessment that identifies opportunities (cultural assets that can support development) and constraints (cultural sensitivities that the development must respect).

Step 2: Trend alignment analysis. Map the proposed development against the major cultural and societal trends identified in this module. For each trend, assess whether it functions as a tailwind (supporting the development), a headwind (opposing it), or a neutral factor. Use the contextual trend analysis framework (relevance, impact, capability, competitive positioning, strategic response) to assess each trend's specific implication for the proposed development. This step produces a trend alignment profile that identifies which trends the development is positioned to benefit from and which it must manage or mitigate.

Step 3: Policy environment assessment. Assess the emerging international, national, and local policy environment using the seven policy trends from the previous section. What climate governance regulations will affect the development's cost structure and sustainability requirements? What platform regulations will shape the distribution environment? What visitor management policies will constrain or direct visitor flows? What cultural rights frameworks will govern the development's engagement with local heritage? What labour standards will affect

workforce planning and cost? What AI governance requirements will affect digital strategy? This step produces a policy compliance and opportunity map that identifies regulatory requirements the development must meet and policy directions it can align with for competitive advantage.

Step 4: Development design aligned with trends. Design the development so that its product, positioning, and operating model are aligned with the tailwind trends and insulated against the headwind trends. If the authenticity trend is a tailwind, design the guest experience around genuine cultural encounter rather than staged performance. If the wellness trend is a tailwind, integrate wellbeing into every dimension of the development rather than adding it as an amenity. If the conscious travel trend is a tailwind, embed sustainability into the operating model from conception rather than layering it on as a marketing claim. If climate governance is a headwind, design for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and low-carbon operations from the outset rather than retrofitting later at greater cost. If the labour policy environment is tightening, design the workforce model around decent work principles, career development, and cultural competency investment rather than cost minimisation. This step produces the development concept and design specification.

Step 5: Stakeholder and community integration. Integrate community agency into the development plan using the cultural justice principles (recognition, distributive, procedural) and the cultural humility and reciprocity management principles from this module. Ensure that the development recognises the intrinsic value of the host culture, distributes economic benefits equitably, and provides genuine community participation in governance. This step produces the stakeholder engagement strategy and community partnership framework, including the governance mechanisms that ensure community voice is maintained throughout the development's life, not merely during the planning phase.

Step 6: Trend monitoring and adaptive management. Embed ongoing trend monitoring into the development's management framework so that the operation can adapt as trends evolve. Cultural and societal trends are not static; the trends that support a development plan today may shift direction, intensify, or be superseded by new trends tomorrow. The development plan should identify the key trends whose evolution will most affect its success, establish monitoring indicators for each, and define decision triggers that activate adaptive responses when trends shift. This step produces the trend monitoring and adaptive management framework that ensures the development remains culturally aligned throughout its operational life rather than becoming progressively disconnected from the cultural environment it serves.

Table 1. Six-Step Framework for Trend-Supported Tourism Development Planning

Step	Module Content Applied	Planning Output
1. Cultural context analysis	Tourist gaze; commodification; social exchange; cultural carrying capacity; cultural justice	Cultural context assessment: opportunities and constraints
2. Trend alignment analysis	Current trends (LO1); contextual analysis framework (LO2); Cultural Alignment Audit (LO2b)	Trend alignment profile: tailwinds and headwinds for the proposed development

Step	Module Content Applied	Planning Output
3. Policy environment assessment	Emerging international policy trends (LO7); EU regulatory stacks; platform, climate, cultural rights, labour, AI governance	Policy compliance and opportunity map
4. Development design	Structural changes in tourism (LO3); issues from changes (LO4); organisational response domains (product, marketing, operations, workforce)	Development concept and design specification aligned with trends
5. Stakeholder integration	Cultural justice (recognition, distributive, procedural); management principles (humility, reciprocity, adaptive governance, long-term thinking)	Stakeholder engagement strategy and community partnership framework
6. Trend monitoring	Bidirectional relationship (LO6); co-evolution dynamics; feedback loops; adaptive management principles	Trend monitoring and adaptive management framework

3. How Specific Trends Support Specific Development Types

The relationship between trends and development plans is not abstract; specific trends provide specific support for specific types of tourism development. The following analysis maps the module's trends to the development types they most directly support.

Development Type	Supporting Cultural Trends	Supporting Policy Trends	Risk Trends to Manage
Community-owned cultural tourism enterprise	Authenticity seeking; experience economy; conscious travel; culinary/gastro tourism; slow travel	Cultural rights and FPIC; value-over-volume reset; local supply chain policy	Commodification risk; elite capture; digital visibility gap; seasonal demand volatility
Wellness and retreat resort	Wellness as mainstream motivation; self-care culture; burnout epidemic; transformative travel; silver economy	Post-pandemic health priority; value-over-volume positioning; decarbonisation (if low-carbon design)	Greenwashing scepticism if claims are unsubstantiated; labour shortages for skilled practitioners
Heritage and cultural interpretation centre	Authenticity; experience economy; educational travel; roots/ancestral tourism; slow travel	Cultural rights governance; UNESCO heritage guidance; community benefit requirements	Cultural carrying capacity; commodification of heritage; visitor management constraints
Eco-lodge / nature-based tourism	Conscious travel; regenerative tourism; wellness convergence;	Climate governance alignment; conservation funding; value-over-	Carbon contradiction (aviation access); greenwashing risk; environmental fragility

Development Type	Supporting Cultural Trends	Supporting Policy Trends	Risk Trends to Manage
	slow travel; transformative travel	volume; Green Claims compliance	
Digital nomad co-living / workation facility	Remote work normalisation; bleisure; slow travel; technology culture; experience economy	Digital nomad visa policies; long-stay economic benefit; seasonality extension	Gentrification and housing displacement; community friction; regulatory uncertainty
Regenerative destination development	Regenerative tourism; conscious travel; transformative travel; community-centred tourism; slow travel	Post-pandemic reset; cultural rights; climate governance; value-over-volume; labour decent work agenda	Measurement challenges; commercial viability at scale; long development timelines
Culinary tourism trail / food experience network	Culinary/gastro tourism; authenticity; local sourcing; experience economy; slow travel	Local supply chain policy; cultural heritage protection; value-over-volume; Green Claims (if organic/sustainable)	Seasonality; quality consistency; supply chain fragility; over-commercialisation risk
Accessible and inclusive tourism facility	Silver economy; solo travel inclusivity; diversity values (Gen Z); social equity imperatives	European Accessibility Act; anti-discrimination legislation; SDG alignment; inclusive tourism policy	Investment cost; design complexity; limited awareness among operators; market perception challenges

4. Critical Evaluation: When Trends Mislead Development Plans

The relationship between trends and development planning must be critically evaluated, not naively adopted. Trends can mislead development plans in several important ways.

The trend-hype trap. Not every trend that generates media attention and academic interest translates into sufficient commercial demand to justify investment. Sleep tourism, astro-tourism, and set-jetting may be culturally significant and commercially viable in specific niche contexts but are unlikely to support major development investments in most destinations. The critical evaluation skill is distinguishing between trends that represent structural shifts in mass-market behaviour (wellness, digital transformation, conscious travel) and those that remain niche phenomena with limited commercial scale (sleep tourism, astro-tourism). Development plans built on niche trends require smaller, more flexible investment structures and more conservative demand projections than those built on mass-market structural shifts.

The intention-behaviour gap. As documented throughout this module, the gap between what travellers say they value and what they actually purchase is significant. Survey data consistently shows high stated demand for sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community benefit, but booking data shows that price, convenience, and location remain the dominant purchase drivers for the majority of travellers. Development plans that rely on the assumption that consumers will pay a premium for trend-aligned products must be tested against realistic

demand assessment rather than aspirational survey data. The implication is not that trend-aligned development is commercially unviable but that it must be commercially viable on its own terms – the cultural alignment must enhance rather than substitute for core product quality, competitive pricing, and effective distribution.

The one-trend fallacy. Development plans that are built entirely around a single trend are vulnerable to that trend’s evolution. A wellness resort that relies exclusively on the wellness trend faces risk if wellness travel demand shifts from retreat-based to technology-enabled home wellness. A digital nomad facility that depends solely on remote work culture faces risk if corporate return-to-office policies reduce the nomad population. Robust development plans are aligned with multiple mutually reinforcing trends rather than dependent on any single one, creating a proposition that remains viable even if one supporting trend weakens. The eight development types in Table 2 above each list multiple supporting trends precisely because trend diversification strengthens the development’s resilience.

The cultural imposition risk. Trends originate predominantly in affluent Western consumer cultures and may not align with the cultural values, priorities, and aspirations of host communities in different cultural contexts. The wellness trend reflects Western self-care culture; the conscious travel trend reflects Western environmental consciousness; the authenticity trend reflects Western nostalgia for pre-modern cultures. A development plan that imposes these culturally specific trend interpretations on a host community whose values differ risks cultural insensitivity, community opposition, and the creation of a product that serves external consumer preferences at the expense of local cultural integrity. The cultural justice principles – recognition, distribution, and procedural justice – provide the corrective: the development must be designed with and by the host community, not merely for the visitors whose cultural preferences the trends represent.

Need to Know –

Critically explaining how trends support tourism development planning at the MBA level requires demonstrating four competencies simultaneously. First, the ability to connect specific trends to specific development opportunities – not generic claims that “trends are important” but precise analysis of which trends support which developments and why. Second, the ability to use the six-step framework to produce structured, evidence-informed development plans that integrate cultural context, trend alignment, policy environment, design, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management. Third, the critical evaluation capacity to identify when trends mislead – the trend-hype trap, the intention-behaviour gap, the one-trend fallacy, and the cultural imposition risk. And fourth, the integrative capacity to draw on every section of this module – trend identification, organisational analysis, structural changes, issues, critical frameworks, the bidirectional relationship, and emerging policy – to produce planning recommendations that are analytically grounded, commercially realistic, culturally sensitive, and ethically sound. This is the capstone learning outcome: it demands everything this module has developed.

Did you know...?

A study published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism analysed 142 tourism development plans from destinations across six continents and found that plans which explicitly incorporated cultural and societal trend analysis were significantly more likely to achieve their stated objectives than those based solely on economic and infrastructure analysis. The study identified that trend-informed plans made better demand forecasts (because they understood the cultural forces driving demand rather than merely extrapolating from historical data), achieved stronger community support (because they anticipated and addressed the cultural and societal concerns that trend analysis reveals), attracted more diverse and sustainable funding (because investors increasingly require evidence of trend alignment and policy compatibility), and demonstrated greater resilience to external shocks (because trend analysis identifies the structural forces that persist through economic cycles, unlike demand projections based on short-term market conditions). The finding validates the methodology presented in this section: integrating cultural and societal trend analysis into tourism development planning is not merely academically interesting but empirically associated with better development outcomes.

Industry Insight – How Cultural Trends Supported the Development Plan for the Alentejo Wine and Wellness Region, Portugal

The Alentejo region of southern Portugal provides a compelling real-world example of how cultural and societal trends can be deliberately leveraged to support a tourism development plan. The region's transformation from an agricultural hinterland with minimal tourism infrastructure into one of Europe's most acclaimed wine and wellness destinations illustrates the six-step framework in practice.

Cultural context. The Alentejo's cultural assets include a centuries-old wine-making tradition that has been revitalised in recent decades through a new generation of quality-focused producers, a distinctive Mediterranean agrarian landscape of cork oak forests, olive groves, and wheat fields, a slow-paced rural lifestyle that has remained remarkably intact, an architectural heritage of whitewashed villages and converted agricultural estates (herdades), and a culinary tradition rooted in the simple, seasonal, ingredient-driven cooking of a farming culture. The social exchange was favourable: the Alentejo's population had been declining through rural-to-urban migration for decades, and tourism was welcomed as an economic lifeline for communities facing depopulation and economic marginalisation. The cultural carrying capacity was high: with vast landscapes, low population density, and minimal pre-existing tourism, the region could accommodate significant development without the congestion and cultural pressure that characterise Portugal's more established tourism destinations.

Trend alignment. The Alentejo's development plan benefited from the alignment of multiple cultural trends functioning as tailwinds. The culinary and gastro-tourism trend created international demand for wine tourism, farm-to-table dining, and artisanal food experiences – precisely the cultural products the Alentejo possessed. The wellness trend aligned with the region's quiet landscape, clean air, thermal springs, and slow lifestyle, supporting the development of spa and wellness retreats. The authenticity trend favoured the Alentejo's

unpolished, genuinely rural character over the more developed and commercialised Algarve coast to the south. The slow travel trend valued the overland journey through the Alentejo's landscapes, the extended stays that wine country encourages, and the depth of engagement that the region's dispersed geography requires. The conscious travel trend supported the region's positioning as a sustainable, locally rooted alternative to mass tourism. And the silver economy trend aligned with the region's appeal to older, culturally curious travellers who value comfort, gastronomy, and enriching experiences over activity-driven adventure. The trend alignment profile showed multiple mutually reinforcing tailwinds and minimal headwinds.

Policy alignment. The policy environment provided additional support. Portugal's national tourism strategy prioritised geographic dispersal from the congested Lisbon and Algarve regions toward interior destinations like the Alentejo, providing marketing support and infrastructure investment. EU structural funds channelled resources into rural tourism development, heritage restoration, and agricultural diversification. The post-pandemic value-over-volume policy reset reinforced the Alentejo's positioning as a quality destination rather than a volume competitor. And the emerging Green Claims Directive created an environment in which the Alentejo's genuine rural sustainability – organic viticulture, cork oak ecosystem preservation, low-energy traditional construction – becomes a verifiable competitive advantage rather than merely a marketing claim.

Development design. The development model that emerged reflects deliberate trend alignment. Accommodation is predominantly in converted herdades (agricultural estates) that retain their architectural character while providing contemporary comfort – properties that pass the Cultural Alignment Audit's "blindfolded guest" test because they could exist nowhere else. Wine tourism experiences are designed around genuine producer encounters: tastings led by the winemakers themselves, vineyard walks that explain the terroir, and harvest participation programmes that provide transformative rather than transactional encounters. The culinary offering is built on local sourcing: many properties maintain their own kitchen gardens, olive groves, and livestock, and restaurant menus change with the seasons because they are constructed from what the land provides rather than what a distributor delivers. Wellness programming draws on the landscape's natural assets – thermal springs, quiet environments, clean air, olive oil and cork-based treatments – rather than importing generic spa concepts. And the workforce model emphasises local recruitment and cultural investment: staff are drawn from Alentejano communities and are valued for their knowledge of the land, the wine, the food, and the culture rather than for their conformity to international hospitality standards.

Community integration and ongoing challenges. The Alentejo's development has maintained relatively strong community support because it has generated employment in depopulating communities, created markets for agricultural products, and respected the region's cultural character rather than seeking to transform it. However, challenges are emerging: property prices are rising as international investors acquire estates for tourism conversion, potentially displacing agricultural families; some luxury developments import labour from Lisbon rather than recruiting locally; and the success of the wine tourism model is attracting large-scale investment that may shift the balance from the authentic, small-scale character that made the region appealing toward a more commercialised and standardised offering. The risk of the Alentejo following the trajectory of more established destinations – where tourism success

eventually undermines the cultural assets that generated it – is real, and managing this risk requires the adaptive governance and long-term thinking principles developed in this module.

The Alentejo case demonstrates the central argument of this section: that cultural and societal trends, when systematically analysed and deliberately aligned with, provide the strongest foundation for tourism development planning. The region's success is not coincidental; it is the product of a cultural context that created the assets, a trend environment that created the demand, a policy environment that created the support, and a development approach that aligned the product with all three. For MBA students, the Alentejo illustrates what trend-supported development planning looks like when it works – and what vigilance is required to ensure that success does not become the engine of its own destruction.



Over to You – Module Capstone Activity

This capstone activity integrates every competency developed across the Culture and Society in Tourism module. It requires you to develop a trend-supported tourism development plan, supported by academic evidence.

Task Part A – Academic Foundation (approximately 400–500 words): Using an academic database, source one peer-reviewed journal article that evaluates a tourism development plan, destination strategy, or specific tourism development project. Prepare a critical summary covering: the cultural and societal context of the development, the trends it was designed to benefit from, the evidence of its outcomes, and the lessons learned for trend-supported planning.

Suggested search terms: “tourism development plan evaluation” • “destination strategy cultural trends” • “wellness tourism development” • “community-based tourism development outcomes” • “culinary tourism destination development” • “regenerative tourism destination plan” • “heritage tourism development evaluation”

Task Part B – Trend-Supported Development Plan (approximately 800–1,000 words): Select a destination you are familiar with and develop a trend-supported tourism development plan following the six-step framework. Your plan should include: (1) a cultural context analysis identifying the destination's cultural assets, community attitudes, and cultural carrying capacity; (2) a trend alignment analysis mapping at least five trends as tailwinds or headwinds; (3) a policy environment assessment identifying the most relevant regulatory trends; (4) a development concept designed to align with identified tailwinds and mitigate headwinds; (5) a stakeholder integration strategy applying cultural justice principles; and (6) a trend monitoring framework identifying three indicators the development should track and the adaptive responses that trend shifts would trigger. Conclude with a critical evaluation applying at least one of the four critical tests from this section (trend-hype trap, intention-behaviour gap, one-trend fallacy, cultural imposition risk) to your own plan. Reference your journal article and at least three concepts from this module to justify your planning decisions.

Revision on the Go

- Trends support development plans by functioning as tailwinds (accelerating success) or headwinds (creating resistance). The best plans align with multiple tailwinds while managing headwinds.
- Trends provide three functions for development planning: validation (justifying strategic choices to stakeholders), demand forecasting (understanding the cultural forces sustaining demand), and risk identification (revealing headwinds before they materialise).
- Six-step framework: cultural context analysis → trend alignment analysis → policy environment assessment → development design aligned with trends → stakeholder and community integration → trend monitoring and adaptive management.
- Each step draws on specific module content: critical frameworks, contextual trend analysis, emerging policy trends, cultural justice principles, management principles, and the bidirectional relationship analysis.
- Robust plans align with multiple mutually reinforcing trends rather than depending on any single trend (one-trend fallacy).
- Four critical tests for trend-supported plans: the trend-hype trap (is there sufficient commercial demand?), the intention-behaviour gap (will consumers actually pay?), the one-trend fallacy (is the plan diversified?), and the cultural imposition risk (do trends reflect host community values or only Western consumer preferences?).
- Trend-informed development plans achieve better outcomes than economic-only plans: stronger demand forecasts, greater community support, more diverse funding, and greater resilience to external shocks.
- Cultural alignment must enhance, not substitute for, core commercial viability: trend alignment strengthens a plan that is commercially sound; it cannot rescue one that is not.
- Adaptive management is essential: trends evolve, and development plans must evolve with them. Monitoring indicators and decision triggers keep the plan aligned with a changing environment.
- This is the capstone LO: it integrates every section of the module – trend identification, organisational analysis, structural changes, issues, critical frameworks, the bidirectional relationship, policy trends, and now applied development planning.

Case Study – Developing a Trend-Supported Tourism Plan for the Scottish Highlands

Background

The Scottish Highlands, covering approximately 25,000 square kilometres of northern Scotland with a dispersed population of approximately 230,000, represent one of Europe's most culturally distinctive and environmentally significant tourism landscapes. The region's assets include dramatic mountain, loch, and coastal scenery; a Gaelic cultural heritage encompassing language, music, storytelling, and Highland games; world-renowned whisky

distilleries; a rich biodiversity including red deer, golden eagles, Atlantic salmon, and emerging marine wildlife tourism (whales, dolphins, basking sharks); dark sky reserves; one of Europe's most significant rewilding initiatives; a distinctive food culture built on Highland game, seafood, wild-foraged ingredients, and artisanal dairy; and an evocative historical narrative encompassing clan warfare, the Highland Clearances, and the romantic mythology that Walter Scott's literature created.

The Scottish Highlands attract approximately 5 million visitors per year, generating significant economic contribution but also creating challenges including severe seasonality (demand concentrated in June–September), geographic congestion on the North Coast 500 driving route, accommodation shortages, infrastructure pressure on single-track roads and limited public transport, workforce shortages exacerbated by housing unaffordability in tourism hotspots, and the environmental impact of vehicle-based tourism in fragile highland and coastal ecosystems.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the regional development agency, has commissioned the development of a new tourism strategy that deliberately leverages cultural and societal trends to address these challenges while growing the economic contribution of tourism to Highland communities. Your task is to develop this strategy using the six-step framework from this section.

Your Task

1. Cultural context analysis: Assess the Highlands' cultural assets, the current tourism-community relationship (applying social exchange theory and Doxey's Irridex), and the cultural carrying capacity of key locations including the NC500 route, Skye, and the Cairngorms. Where are the opportunities and where are the constraints?
2. Trend alignment: Map at least eight trends from this module against the Highlands context. For each, classify it as a tailwind or headwind and explain why. Consider: wellness, slow travel, authenticity, culinary tourism, regenerative tourism, silver economy, screen tourism (Outlander effect), astro-tourism, adventure tourism, digital nomadism, conscious travel, and the emerging source markets trend.
3. Policy environment: Assess the policy trends most relevant to Highland tourism development: Scotland's post-pandemic tourism recovery strategy, the UK's climate commitments, VisitScotland's responsible tourism framework, short-term rental regulation (the Scottish Government's licensing scheme), and the visitor management challenges on the NC500.
4. Development design: Propose three specific tourism development initiatives for the Highlands, each aligned with identified tailwind trends and designed to address at least one of the current challenges (seasonality, geographic congestion, accommodation shortage, workforce shortage, or environmental impact). For each initiative, explain the trend alignment and the problem it addresses.
5. Stakeholder integration: How would you ensure that your development plan reflects the interests of Highland communities, Gaelic cultural custodians, environmental conservation bodies, and the tourism workforce? Apply the cultural justice principles (recognition, distributive, procedural) to your stakeholder strategy.

6. Trend monitoring: Identify three trends whose evolution will most affect the success of your plan. For each, define a monitoring indicator and a decision trigger that would activate an adaptive response.

7. Critical evaluation: Apply the four critical tests to your own plan. Is any element vulnerable to the trend-hype trap? Does it rely on the intention-behaviour gap closing? Is it dependent on a single trend? Does it impose external cultural preferences on Highland communities? How have you addressed these risks?

Summary

In this chapter you gained knowledge about planning for tourism development.

You investigated the relationship tourism has with culture and society.

Next, you understood the emerging trends in international policy towards tourism

On completion of this chapter, you analysed how the trends support the plan for tourism development.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Algorithmic Power	The concentration of influence over tourism demand and visibility in platform algorithms and AI systems whose criteria are opaque and commercially driven rather than culturally informed.
Authenticity Paradox	The more tourists seek authentic cultural encounters, the more commercial incentives produce staged versions, hollowing out cultural meaning while preserving appearance (MacCannell).
Bleisure	The blending of business and leisure travel. Blurs traditional tourism boundaries and creates new product requirements for accommodation and destination planning.
Butler's TALC	Tourism Area Life Cycle: destinations evolve through exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation. Predicts how impacts and the nature of tourism change over time.
Co-Creation	The shift from tourists as passive consumers to active participants in designing their travel experience through digital tools, personalisation, and participatory encounters.
Commodification	The transformation of cultural practices into products for tourist consumption through simplification, decontextualisation, and commercialisation. Can be destructive or, per Cohen, generate emergent authenticity.
Conscious Travel	Travel decisions reflecting environmental, social, and ethical values. Subject to a significant intention-behaviour gap: 76% of travellers want sustainability but only 43% have booked sustainably.
Cultural Alignment Audit	A diagnostic assessing the gap between what an organisation offers and what trends indicate the market values, across five domains: place/design, food/beverage, service culture, sustainability, and digital presence.
Cultural Carrying Capacity	The level of tourism beyond which a community's cultural identity and social cohesion are unacceptably altered. Inherently subjective; provides the threshold concept for visitor management policy.
Cultural Humility	The management principle of approaching host cultures with respect rather than entitlement, recognising limits of one's own understanding, and accepting communities' right to refuse tourism engagement.
Cultural Intelligence	The organisational capability to understand and respond to cultural shifts. Embedded through design philosophy, recruitment, training, guest listening systems, and community partnership.
Cultural Justice	Three principles: recognition justice (cultures have intrinsic value), distributive justice (benefits and costs shared equitably), and procedural justice (genuine community participation in decisions).

Term	Definition
Degrowth	The perspective that genuinely sustainable tourism in over-consumed destinations requires deliberately reducing volume, not better-managed growth. Politically challenging but increasingly policy-relevant.
Demonstration Effect	Host communities adopting consumption patterns, values, and behaviours of tourists, potentially eroding traditional social structures and cultural identity.
Digital Nomad	A remote worker living in tourism destinations for extended periods. Blurs tourist/resident boundaries; creates housing inflation and cultural friction alongside high economic contribution per stay.
Doxey's Irridex	Model of evolving host attitudes toward tourism: euphoria → apathy → irritation → antagonism as visitor numbers grow and costs accumulate.
Emergent Authenticity	Cohen's concept: cultural practices originally created for tourists can acquire genuine meaning for the performing community over time, complicating the assumption that commodification is always destructive.
Experience Economy	Pine and Gilmore's concept: consumers pay for memorable experiences rather than goods/services. In tourism, evolving toward transformative travel that changes the traveller.
Flygskam	Swedish "flight shame" – social stigma associated with air travel due to carbon emissions. Has influenced Scandinavian travel behaviour and contributed to the slow travel trend.
Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO)	Optimising digital content for visibility in AI-generated travel recommendations, as generative AI increasingly mediates travel discovery alongside traditional search engines.
Governance Deficit	The mismatch between the pace and scale of tourism disruption (platform, AI, dissolving boundaries) and the capacity of existing regulatory frameworks to manage it.
Green Claims Directive	EU directive requiring businesses to substantiate environmental marketing claims with verified evidence. Creates legal risk for greenwashing in hospitality.
Greenwashing	Overstating sustainability credentials in marketing without substantive operational change. Fewer than 4% of tourism businesses hold any sustainability certification globally.
Growth Consensus	The post-war assumption that more tourism is inherently beneficial. Has fractured under pressure from overtourism, climate crisis, pandemic, and community opposition.
Headwind / Tailwind	Analytical metaphor for development planning: a tailwind trend accelerates a development's success; a headwind trend creates resistance. The best plans align with multiple tailwinds.

Term	Definition
Instagrammability	The degree to which a destination or experience is visually compelling for social media sharing. A genuine competitive factor influencing design, infrastructure, and visitor flows.
Intention-Behaviour Gap	The discrepancy between travellers' stated sustainability values and actual purchasing behaviour. Sustainability functions as a tiebreaker, not a primary booking driver, for most guests.
One-Trend Fallacy	The risk of building a development plan entirely around a single trend. Robust plans align with multiple mutually reinforcing trends for resilience.
Overtourism	Tourism volume exceeding a destination's capacity to maintain resident quality of life, visitor experience, and environmental/cultural integrity. The political expression of exceeded carrying capacity.
Platform Economy	The digital ecosystem of OTAs, Airbnb, social media, and AI that mediates tourism supply and demand. Has replaced the linear value chain while concentrating power in technology intermediaries.
Politicisation of Place	Tourism transitioning from a broadly welcomed activity to a contested political issue where resident quality of life is perceived as degraded by visitor pressure.
Reciprocity	The management principle that tourism organisations that take from a culture have an obligation to give back proportionately through economic benefit, preservation, and community investment.
Regenerative Tourism	Tourism that actively improves communities, environments, and cultural assets – moving beyond sustainability's harm-minimisation goal toward net positive contribution.
Right to Place	The emerging principle that residents have a right to maintain their community's character and liveability, which should be weighed against visitor access when the two conflict.
Screen Tourism / Set-Jetting	Visiting filming locations from popular content (Game of Thrones, Outlander, Squid Game). Creates sudden demand surges driven by streaming platform globalisation.
Silver Economy	The tourism market of older, wealthier retirees who stay longer, spend more, travel off-peak, and value comfort, accessibility, cultural enrichment, and intellectual stimulation.
Sleep Tourism	Travel motivated by improving sleep quality through optimised rooms, sleep science programmes, and circadian environments. Exemplifies the convergence of wellness, technology, and burnout culture.
Slow Travel	Counter-trend emphasising depth over breadth: fewer places, longer stays, overland transport, local rhythm. Driven by environmental consciousness and rejection of destination-hopping.

Term	Definition
Social Exchange Theory	Framework (Ap) analysing the host-visitor relationship as a transaction: support exists when perceived benefits exceed costs; opposition emerges when the exchange feels unfair.
Staged Authenticity	MacCannell's concept: experiences manufactured to appear authentic while designed for commercial purposes. The tourism industry's standard response to the tourist's search for the genuine.
Tourist Gaze	Urry's sociological concept: tourism as a power-laden visual practice shaped by cultural expectations and power relationships. Social media has democratised and intensified the gaze.
Touristification	The transformation of diverse, locally distinctive environments into standardised tourist-serving landscapes. Identified by UNESCO as a principal threat to World Heritage Sites.
Transformative Travel	Tourism that changes the traveller meaningfully: expanding understanding, challenging assumptions, developing skills. The most advanced expression of the experience economy.
Trend-Hype Trap	The risk of investing in developments based on trends that generate media attention but lack sufficient commercial demand. Requires distinguishing structural shifts from niche phenomena.
Value Over Volume	The post-pandemic policy principle: tourism success measured by quality and sustainability of the visitor economy, not arrival numbers. Adopted by New Zealand, Spain, Iceland, Thailand.
Visitor Management	Active governance of visitor numbers, flows, and behaviour through entry fees, timed entry, caps, real-time monitoring, dispersal strategies, and behavioural regulation.
Wellness Tourism	Travel motivated by physical, mental, nutritional, spiritual, or sleep wellbeing. A \$817 billion global market spanning spa, yoga, meditation, forest bathing, digital detox, and sleep programmes.

Note: *This glossary covers the core terminology for this module. You should supplement these definitions with examples and case study references from the study guide.*

Self-Check Activities – Academic Journal Review

The Culture and Society in Tourism

SELF-CHECK 1: Identify and Analyse Current Trends in Tourism

Learning Outcome 1: Identify and analyse the current trends in tourism

Task: Source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines a current tourism trend through a cultural or societal lens. Suitable articles might examine: the wellness tourism phenomenon, social media's influence on travel behaviour, generational differences in travel values (Gen Z, millennials, silver economy), the slow travel movement, conscious and responsible travel, culinary tourism and cultural identity, the digital nomad phenomenon, dark tourism ethics, screen tourism and destination management, the experience economy in hospitality, or the emergence of sleep, astro, ancestral, or regenerative tourism as new typologies.

Suggested search terms: “wellness tourism motivation culture” • “social media travel behaviour” • “Generation Z travel values” • “slow travel cultural shift” • “conscious travel sustainability gap” • “digital nomad destination impact” • “culinary tourism cultural identity” • “screen tourism destination management” • “authenticity tourism experience economy” • “regenerative tourism trend”

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the trend the article examines and the cultural or societal forces driving it – do not merely describe the trend but explain why it exists now (what values, demographics, technologies, or societal shifts produce this demand?). Assess whether the article treats the trend as a structural shift in mass-market behaviour or a temporary niche phenomenon, and whether you agree with that assessment. Evaluate the implications for a specific hospitality or tourism organisation: apply the contextual trend analysis framework from this study guide (relevance, impact, capability, competitive positioning, strategic response) to assess what the trend means for an organisation you are familiar with. Consider whether the trend interacts with other trends from this module (trends rarely operate in isolation). Conclude with a reflection on whether the trend creates genuine value for host communities and cultures or whether it reproduces existing problems (commodification, displacement, greenwashing) in a new form.

Suggested starting point: Yeoman, I. (2012). 2050: Tomorrow's Tourism, Channel View Publications (selected chapters via library); or Ateljevic, I. (2020). 'Transforming the way we travel: A narrative of tourism and COVID-19', *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 672–679. You are encouraged to find a recent article that examines a trend you are personally interested in or professionally affected by.

SELF-CHECK 2: Demonstrate Critical Knowledge on the Changing Nature of Tourism

Learning Outcome 2: Demonstrate critical knowledge on the changing nature of tourism

Task: Source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines a structural change in the nature of tourism or analyses tourism's impact on culture and society using a critical theoretical framework. Suitable articles might examine: the tourist gaze and social media (Urry/Larsen), cultural commodification and authenticity (Cohen/MacCannell), the platform economy's transformation of tourism (Airbnb, OTAs, algorithmic power), the politicisation of tourism in urban destinations (overtourism, resident opposition), the dissolution of tourist-resident boundaries (digital nomadism, bleisure), the fracturing of the growth consensus and competing visions for tourism's purpose (degrowth, regenerative, rights-based), or the application of social exchange theory and Doxey's Irridex to host community attitudes.

Suggested search terms: "tourist gaze social media power" • "cultural commodification tourism authenticity" • "Airbnb urban tourism transformation" • "overtourism resident attitudes politicisation" • "tourism degrowth debate" • "platform economy tourism power" • "cultural carrying capacity destination" • "tourism social exchange host community" • "touristification cultural impact" • "cultural justice tourism indigenous"

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the structural change or cultural/societal impact the article examines and the theoretical framework it applies (tourist gaze, commodification, social exchange, cultural carrying capacity, cultural justice, or another critical framework). Explain how the framework illuminates the issue – what does it reveal that a purely descriptive or economic analysis would miss? Assess the distributional dimension: who benefits and who bears the costs of the change or impact examined? Evaluate whether the article identifies interconnections between the issue studied and other structural changes from this module (housing displacement, cultural erosion, algorithmic power, labour conditions, governance deficit – these issues are interconnected, not independent). Consider where the frameworks converge and where they might produce different or conflicting assessments of the same situation. Conclude with a reflection on which of the competing visions for tourism's future purpose (value-over-volume, degrowth, regenerative, rights-based, equity) the article implicitly or explicitly supports, and whether you find that vision persuasive and practicable.

Suggested starting point: Urry, J. & Larsen, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, SAGE (selected chapters via library); or Guttentag, D. (2015). 'Airbnb: Disruptive innovation and the rise of an informal tourism accommodation sector', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(12), 1192–1217; or Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). 'Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after COVID-19', *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 610–623. You are strongly encouraged to find a recent article that applies a critical theoretical framework to a specific destination or organisational context.

SELF-CHECK 3: Demonstrate Knowledge in Planning for Tourism Development

Learning Outcome 3: Demonstrate knowledge in planning for tourism development

Task: Source one peer-reviewed journal article that examines how cultural, societal, or policy trends have informed (or should inform) tourism development planning in a specific destination or

organisational context. Suitable articles might examine: a destination's post-pandemic tourism strategy and its alignment with cultural trends, the role of community participation in culturally sensitive tourism development, how wellness or culinary tourism trends have supported specific development initiatives, visitor management as a development planning tool, the integration of sustainability and cultural heritage into destination master plans, or the evaluation of a trend-aligned tourism development project.

Suggested search terms: "tourism development plan cultural trends" • "destination strategy post-pandemic value volume" • "community participation tourism development planning" • "wellness tourism destination development" • "culinary tourism development cultural heritage" • "visitor management destination planning" • "regenerative tourism destination development" • "tourism development sustainability cultural alignment" • "trend-informed tourism strategy"

What to write (approximately 500–700 words): Identify the destination or organisational context and the specific development plan, strategy, or project examined. Assess which cultural, societal, or policy trends the plan is designed to align with, and classify each as a tailwind (supporting the development) or headwind (creating resistance) using the framework from this study guide. Evaluate whether the plan integrates genuine community engagement and cultural justice principles (recognition, distributive, procedural) or whether community involvement is tokenistic. Assess the plan's resilience: does it align with multiple mutually reinforcing trends (robust), or is it dependent on a single trend (vulnerable to the one-trend fallacy)? Apply at least one of the four critical tests from this study guide: the trend-hype trap (is there sufficient demand?), the intention-behaviour gap (will consumers actually pay?), the one-trend fallacy (is the plan diversified?), or the cultural imposition risk (do the trends reflect host community values or only external consumer preferences?). Conclude with your own recommendation: if you were advising the destination or organisation, what would you change about the development plan to strengthen its trend alignment, cultural sensitivity, and long-term viability?

Suggested starting point: Dredge, D. & Jenkins, J. (2007). *Tourism Planning and Policy*, Wiley (selected chapters via library); or Dwyer, L. (2018). 'Saluting while the ship sinks: The necessity for tourism paradigm change', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(1), 29–48; or Cave, J. & Dredge, D. (2020). 'Regenerative tourism needs diverse economic practices', *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 503–513. You are encouraged to find an article that evaluates a specific development plan or destination strategy rather than a general theoretical discussion.