

# CULTURAL TOURISM

## Information Communication Technologies, Tourism, Culture, and Art

*The following text is reproduced with the kind permission of Dimitrios Buhalis and Valeria Minghetti, Guest Editors of the special issue of 'Information Technology & Tourism' Volume 4, Number 2. The text forms part of the Introduction to this issue (entitled 'Information Communication Technologies, Tourism, Culture, and Art') and perfectly encapsulates the notion of 'cultural tourism' whilst pointing out the important role that information communications technologies have to play in its development:*

Culture and tourism are two closely-interrelated concepts. One propels the other and a combination of both covers a wide range of activities taking place daily in most places round the globe. Cultural tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the world tourism industry.

Culture is a complex and difficult-to-define concept. There is no universal definition of culture, heritage, or art, as they include different manifestations, meanings and products, ranging from archaeology, to architecture, painting, music, traditions, cuisine, and folklore, etc. Consequently, cultural tourism is extremely hard to define, because of the wide range of of cultural attractions available and the various motivations of cultural tourists.

According to Richards (1996), cultural tourism has been traditionally associated with "high culture." However, it is widely recognised that old distinctions between high and popular culture are disappearing rapidly. Cultural tourists are increasingly engaged in a search for new knowledge and experiences, as part of a general process of self-development, and understanding. Appreciating, or participating in culture is often either a core or supplementary element of the holiday experience. Increasingly-experienced and sophisticated consumers are interested not just in traditional cultural attractions, such as museums and monuments, but also in the living culture of a destination, such as language, customs, and gastronomy.

On the other hand, the supply of cultural tourism is evolving rapidly. A great number of tour operators are packing several products together to offer a cultural experience around a theme that can relate to music, architecture, history, or even cooking and artifacts creation. Several suppliers aim at fulfilling the desire for "edu-tainment": education and entertainment at the same time. Also, several destinations begin to appreciate that it is pointless to compete on price and mass tourism and therefore promote their culture as a major factor of product differentiation.

New technologies and the Internet in particular bring the world closer together, by providing powerful interactive tools for interpretation, research, and understanding. IT enables tourists and visitors to familiarise themselves with the culture of destinations around the globe. The IT impacts on cultural tourism can be summarised in the following issues as New Technologies:

- Assist the preservation of the cultural identity of a population/destination and spread a better understanding of customs and traditions, to the advantage of both tourists and local community.
- Contribute to the promotion and increase the "visibility" of cultural resources and attractions, especially those "niche" products and services that are still excluded from main tourism routes (e.g., small museums and little-known events) and optimise marketing and management strategies (organisations, etc.).
- Support the monitoring of tourism impacts and the implementation of efficient visitor flow management strategies.
- Contribute to the promotion and development of partnerships between cultural and tourism operators (intermediaries, hotels, local tourist boards, etc.) and enhance the marketing power of cultural operators in the tourism value chain.

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