



Received: 19 January 2026

Revised: 27 January 2026

Accepted: 29 January 2026

CULTURAL TOURISM IN TRANSITION: EVOLUTION, DIGITAL DISRUPTION, AND RESILIENT PATHWAYS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Komkrit MAISOOK¹, Pinsupha THANGTHONG², Pranotporn THANGTHONG³ and Dalivanh SIRISACK⁴

1 Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi, Thailand;

komkrit.m@rmutsb.ac.th

2 Dhurakij Pundit University, Thailand; 66110759@dpu.ac.th

3 White Tiger Travel Co., Ltd., Thailand; yoksom2002@gmail.com

4 Souphanouvong University, Lao PDR.; sirisackdalivanh@gmail.com

Handling Editor:

Professor Dr. Ismail Suardi WEKKE

UM BARRU, Indonesia

(This article belongs to the Theme 2: Heritage and Wisdom in the Digital Age)

Reviewers:

1) Assistant Professor Dr. PHRAWACHIRAHAMAKUN

MCU, Thailand

2) Assistant Professor Dr. Samanan RATTANASIRIVILAI

SSRU, Thailand

Abstract

This article presents a systematic review of cultural tourism's multifaceted evolution during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025), a period defined by rapid expansion, global crisis, and structural transformation. Addressing critical gaps in interdisciplinary research, the study employs a documentary methodology to synthesize insights from international reports and peer-reviewed literature. It traces the sector's conceptual shift from traditional tangible heritage to dynamic forms, including creative, gastronomy, and pop-culture tourism. The analysis critically examines the pre-COVID-19 era's economic growth alongside the escalating threats of overtourism and cultural commodification. Subsequently, it evaluates the pandemic's pivotal role as a catalyst for digital disruption, accelerating the adoption of virtual tourism, AI, and the Metaverse. The findings reveal that post-pandemic recovery is characterized by an uneven trajectory, necessitating a paradigm shift towards community-based resilience and environmental sustainability. Conclusively, the paper argues that future viability depends on balancing economic imperatives with socio-cultural integrity. It offers strategic frameworks for policymakers to navigate the digital divide and ethical challenges, positioning this work as a vital reference for understanding the complex interplay between preservation, innovation, and sustainability in the contemporary global tourism landscape.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism Dynamics, Digital Heritage Transformation, Post-Pandemic Resilience, Creative Economy, Sustainable Destination Management

Citation Information: Maisook, K., Thangthong, P., Thangthong, P., & Sirisack, D. (2025). Cultural Tourism in Transition: Evolution, Digital Disruption, and Resilient Pathways for the 21st Century. *Thai Arts and Culture Review*, 1(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.14456/tacr.2025>.

Introduction

Cultural tourism has emerged as one of the most crucial mechanisms within the global tourism industry during the first quarter of the 21st century. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that cultural tourism accounts for approximately 39% of global tourism (Matteucci et al., 2022). This trend shows a continuous increase from 37% in 1995 to 40% in 2004, according to UNWTO data (Henriques et al., 2017). This growth in cultural tourism is not coincidental but reflects a profound shift in tourist demand for meaningful experiences, cultural learning, and connection with the unique identity of destinations (Duxbury et al., 2021). Furthermore, cultural tourism plays a vital role in driving the creative economy, generating employment, and fostering sustainable local community development (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Borowiecki et al., 2016).

While cultural tourism has significant potential to create both economic and social value, existing research still presents several critical gaps. Firstly, much research often focuses on a single dimension, such as economic or cultural factors, lacking an interdisciplinary integration that comprehensively covers economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technological dimensions (Matteucci et al., 2022). Secondly, most studies published before 2020 could not anticipate or analyze the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on cultural tourism, while post-COVID research still lacks systematic comparative analysis between pre- and post-pandemic periods (Gössling et al., 2021). Thirdly, despite existing studies on overtourism and sustainability challenges, there is an apparent absence of a conceptual framework that integrates knowledge from diverse perspectives to facilitate concrete practical application (Russo & Scarnato, 2018). This research article has three primary objectives. Firstly, to establish a comprehensive fundamental understanding of cultural tourism in the 21st century. Secondly, to delineate an overview of the status and trends of cultural tourism during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025) across various dimensions, by segmenting the analysis into three critical periods: pre-COVID-19 (2001-2019), during the crisis (2020-2021), and post-COVID (2022-2025). Thirdly, to synthesize lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis and propose policy and practical guidelines for diverse stakeholders.

This study employs a documentary research approach, systematically reviewing and analyzing secondary data. The primary data sources include (1) statistical reports and academic documents from international organizations such as UNWTO, UNESCO, World Bank, and OECD; (2) peer-reviewed research articles published in international academic journals during 2001-2025, retrieved from databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PubMed, TCI, and Google Scholar; and (3) books and policy research reports related to cultural tourism and the creative economy. The analytical framework for this study comprises four key dimensions: economic-business, socio-cultural, environmental, and technological-innovation. The findings are presented using a descriptive-analytical approach, emphasizing synthesis, comparison, and critical appraisal.

Evolution of Cultural Tourism Concepts and Forms in the Contemporary Era

The definition and scope of cultural tourism in the 21st century have undergone significant evolution, shifting from traditional concepts focused primarily on visits to historical sites and museums to a more comprehensive, complex understanding. The UNWTO defines cultural tourism as "the movement of persons essentially for cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to archaeological sites and monuments, travel to study nature, art, or folklore, and varied cultural experiences" (Henriques et al., 2017). However, this definition has been criticized for being overly broad and lacking specificity.

Contemporary scholars have expanded the understanding of cultural tourism by categorizing it into two crucial dimensions: Tangible Cultural Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage. Tangible heritage includes UNESCO World Heritage Sites, historical monuments,

archaeological sites, and culturally significant edifices that are visually perceivable and physically tangible (Lin et al., 2024). Conversely, intangible heritage, recognized by the 2003 UNESCO Convention, encompasses traditions, performing arts, rituals, local wisdom, language, and craftsmanship passed down through generations (Blake, 2008; Alivizatou, 2012). This shift towards emphasizing intangible heritage reflects the recognition that culture is not static but a living, continuously evolving process (Carbone, 2016). To systematically comprehend these dynamic transformations, it is essential to categorize the development of cultural tourism into distinct paradigmatic phases. As this study shows, the sector has not merely expanded in volume but also undergone fundamental structural shifts driven by globalization, changes in consumer behavior, and technological disruptions. Figure 1 visualizes this evolutionary trajectory from 2001 to 2025, demarcating the transition from static heritage preservation to dynamic creative experiences, and finally, to the current phase of digital resilience and sustainability.

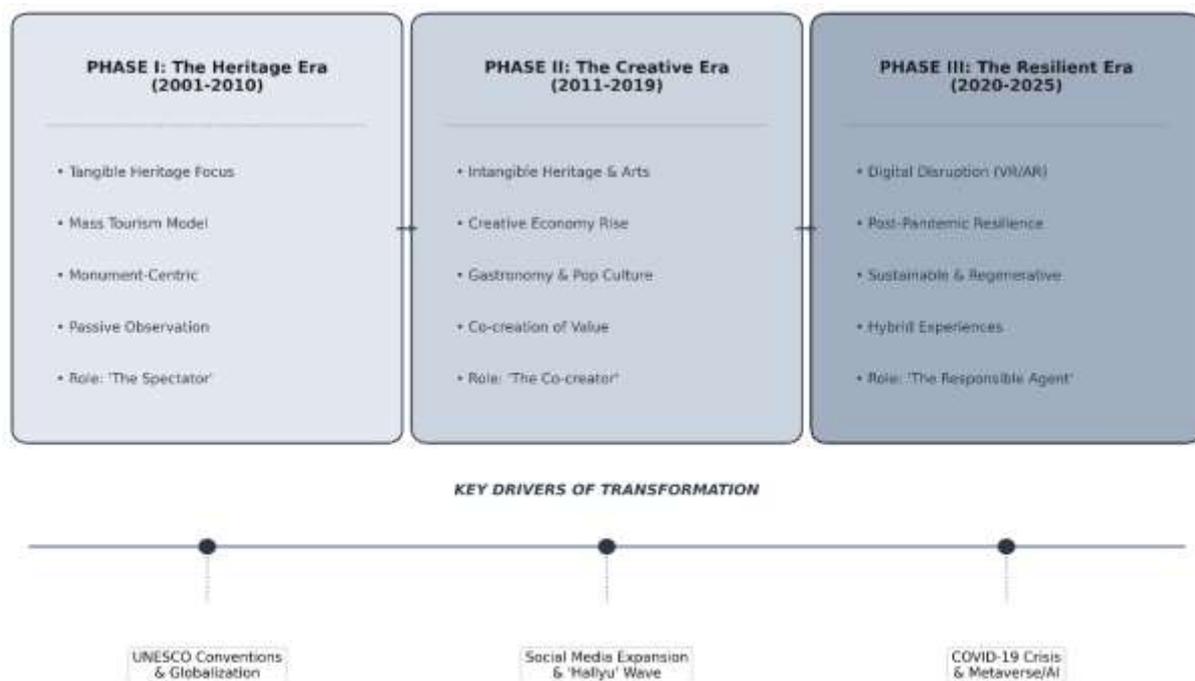


Figure 1 The Evolutionary Trajectory of Cultural Tourism (2001-2025): Shifting Paradigms and Key Drivers

Aligning with the "Creative and Experience Era" illustrated in the framework, cultural tourism in the 21st century takes many forms, reflecting the complexity of contemporary culture. The first form is Creative Tourism, defined by Richards and Raymond as "tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation and learning experiences related to the arts, cultural heritage or the distinctive characteristics of a destination" (Duxbury et al., 2021). This concept transforms tourists' role from passive spectators to active, engaged co-creators (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). The second form is Gastronomy Tourism, which centers on local culinary experiences as the core of travel. Here, food is not merely sustenance but a medium for accessing unique cultural identities and community memories (Fusté-Forné, 2020; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2021). The third form is Film-Induced Tourism, in which travelers visit the filming locations of popular movies, series, or TV shows, exemplified by the Game of Thrones phenomenon, which turned small Mediterranean towns into immensely popular destinations (Huerta-Viso et al., 2024). The fastest-growing form over the past decade has been Pop Culture Tourism, particularly the Hallyu Wave phenomenon driven by K-pop and K-drama. The BTS group alone generated an economic impact of up to 12.3 billion USD for South Korea in 2019, attracting a massive

number of international tourists to related key sites (Fahrissa, 2022; Nair, 2025). The success of the Hallyu Wave demonstrates a "Cultural Multiplier Effect," where pop culture can expand into other industries such as fashion, food, and technology (Lou, 2025). Additionally, other emerging forms include Cultural Routes Tourism, which connects multiple destinations through historical routes or cultural themes (Lin et al., 2024), and Festival Tourism, focusing on participation in music, art, or local traditional festivals (Altun et al., 2024), or even Medical Tourism, such as cosmetic surgery businesses (Ritwattanavanich et al., 2018).

The relationship between cultural tourism and the creative economy is another significant dimension that has garnered considerable attention in the 21st century. The creative economy, as defined by Florida (2002) and UNCTAD (2010), refers to economic activities rooted in human creativity, skills, and talent, encompassing the arts, design, media, and digital technologies. The integration of cultural tourism with the creative economy creates opportunities to develop high-value tourism products, such as contemporary-designed handicrafts, performances blending tradition with technology, and personalized tourist experiences (Canaan, 2019; Zhang, 2022). However, this linkage has been criticized for potentially leading to the commodification of culture and the loss of authenticity, particularly when cultural heritage is overly adapted to market demands (Richards & Marques, 2012).

Dynamics of Cultural Tourism in the Pre-COVID-19 Era (2001-2019)

The nearly two decades preceding the COVID-19 pandemic marked a period of rapid expansion for the global cultural tourism market. International tourist arrivals surged from 674 million in 2000 to 1,460 million in 2019, representing an average annual growth rate of 3.8% (Shao et al., 2020). Within this growth, cultural tourism constituted approximately 39-40%, or over 560 million annual arrivals (Matteucci et al., 2022). International tourism receipts also increased substantially, rising from 485 billion USD in 1995 to 1.649 trillion USD in 2018 (Shao et al., 2020). This growth, however, was not uniformly distributed globally, with a concentration in Europe and Asia-Pacific. Europe accounted for roughly 50% of all international tourists, while the Asia-Pacific region recorded the highest average annual growth rate of 6.1% (Brida et al., 2016).

From an economic and business perspective, cultural tourism has proven to be a significant driver of growth, particularly in developing countries rich in cultural resources. Tourism contributed approximately 10% to global GDP and employment (Zhao et al., 2023). The Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis has been confirmed by numerous empirical studies, especially in European countries (Matzana et al., 2022) and including Thailand (Rattanasirivilai, 2023), where tourism exhibits a positive correlation with long-term economic growth. Studies on the economic impact of UNESCO World Heritage Sites indicate a significant positive correlation between the number of World Heritage Sites in each country and tourism revenue and employment in the tourism sector, particularly within EU member states (Škrabić Perić et al., 2021). However, these economic benefits were often inequitably distributed, with a majority flowing to multinational corporations and large capital investors, while local communities received minimal benefits and bore negative externalities (Holden & Fennell, 2013).

Regional diversity was a key characteristic of cultural tourism prior to COVID-19. In Southeast Asia, cultural tourism experienced rapid growth, driven by an expanding Chinese middle class and increased travel convenience. The number of outbound Chinese tourists grew from 10 million in 2000 to 130 million in 2017 (Zhu et al., 2021) and over 150 million in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). Countries like Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam significantly benefited from this trend, attracting Chinese tourists interested in cultural heritage sites such as Angkor Wat, the Grand Palace, and Ha Long Bay (Shao et al., 2020). In Europe and the Mediterranean, historic cities like Paris, Rome, Venice, and Barcelona remained powerful magnets for global tourists. Spain alone welcomed over 82 million international tourists in 2017, ranking it second globally in both visitor numbers and receipts (Artal-Tur & Correia, 2019).

A notable phenomenon during this period was the rise of the Hallyu Wave (Korean Wave), which fundamentally reshaped the cultural tourism landscape in East Asia. South Korea saw its tourist arrivals increase 14-fold between 1980 and 2014, propelled mainly by Korean pop culture (Bajgier-Kowalska et al., 2017). Research on Hallyu's impact on tourism in Korea revealed that Korean TV series and films significantly influenced tourists' travel decisions, especially those from the United States, China, Japan, and Hong Kong (Kim et al., 2017). Furthermore, studies indicated that the Hallyu Wave not only boosted tourist numbers but also created a multiplier effect on other Korean exports, including cosmetics, food, and electronics, with a total value exceeding 12 billion USD in 2019 (Fahrisa, 2022).

Digital innovation and technology began playing a crucial role in cultural tourism from the mid-2010s onwards. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok became essential tools for destination marketing, with tourist-shared photos and videos inspiring many others to travel (Kang & Schuett, 2013). Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies were increasingly adopted in museums and heritage sites to enhance visitor experiences, for instance, by using AR to reconstruct damaged ancient sites or VR to create immersive museum experiences (Guttentag, 2010). Sharing economy platforms like Airbnb transformed travel patterns by allowing tourists closer access to local accommodations and authentic local lifestyles (Guttentag, 2015). However, Airbnb's growth was also criticized for contributing to gentrification and housing shortages for residents in many key tourist cities (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018).

The challenges and problems emerging during this period grew increasingly complex and severe. Overtourism, or excessive tourism, became a significant public discourse from the 1980s onwards (Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2020). Cities like Venice, which welcomed over 30 million tourists annually compared to its mere 55,000 residents, experienced a severe decline in the quality of life for its inhabitants, infrastructural strain, and damage to historical architecture (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019). Barcelona faced similar issues, leading to Anti-Tourism Movements where residents protested and demanded local government control over tourist numbers and short-term rental expansion (Colomb & Novy, 2016). Research on Barcelona residents' attitudes towards tourism revealed that negative economic impacts, such as rising rents and living costs, were the primary drivers of negative sentiment towards tourism (Milano et al., 2018).

The issue of cultural commodification and authenticity has been a widely debated topic in academic circles. Some scholars argued that cultural tourism development leads to the adaptation and commercialization of local cultures to meet tourist demands, resulting in a loss of original meaning and value (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1988). In contrast, other scholars posited that authenticity is a socially constructed concept, and culture is inherently flexible and dynamic; thus, tourism can stimulate cultural revitalization and innovation (Wang, 1999). Furthermore, the environmental impact of cultural tourism became an escalating concern. Studies indicate that tourism accounts for approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with air travel and accommodation as the primary sources (Lenzen et al., 2018). This climate change, in turn, emerged as a severe threat to numerous World Heritage Sites, particularly those in coastal and low-lying areas vulnerable to rising sea levels and intensified natural disasters (Sesana et al., 2021).

Crisis, Adaptation, and Recovery of Cultural Tourism in the COVID-19 Era (2020-2025)

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, had the most severe impact on the global tourism industry in its history. International tourist arrivals plummeted by 74% in 2020 compared to 2019 (Wu et al., 2022). The resultant loss in international tourism revenue amounted to approximately 1.3 trillion USD, exceeding the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis eightfold (Sharma et al., 2021). While the UNWTO initially projected a 20-30% decline in tourist numbers, equivalent to a loss of 300-450 billion USD, the actual situation proved far

worse than anticipated (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Cultural tourism was particularly hard-hit due to its frequent reliance on enclosed spaces such as museums, theaters, and indoor heritage sites, as well as festivals and cultural events that require large gatherings.

The consequences for museums and cultural heritage sites were both short-term and long-term. A UNESCO survey conducted in mid-2020 revealed that 90% of museums worldwide had to temporarily close, with smaller and developing country museums facing a high risk of permanent closure (Agostino et al., 2022). Revenue losses from admissions and souvenir sales forced many museums to reduce staff, cancel or postpone exhibitions, and cut budgets for conservation and restoration (Agostino et al., 2022). UNESCO World Heritage Sites that depended on tourism for primary funding faced severe resource shortages, increasing their vulnerability to damage and degradation (Yang et al., 2021).

The impact on employment within the cultural tourism sector underscored the industry's fragility. Studies on job precarity and income inequality during COVID-19 revealed that countries highly reliant on tourism experienced significant job losses, particularly affecting low-skilled workers and informal sector employees, predominantly women and youth (Sharma et al., 2021). In many developing countries, local communities whose livelihoods primarily depended on cultural tourism faced severe socio-economic crises, with some reverting to subsistence agriculture or migrating to larger cities in search of work (Dube, 2021).

Adaptation and innovation during the crisis served as a critical turning point for cultural tourism in the 21st century. The digital transformation accelerated rapidly over the course of months. Museums and heritage sites globally embraced digital technologies to reach audiences despite closures. Virtual exhibitions, online tours, and digital cultural activities saw a massive increase (Agostino et al., 2022). The phenomenon of "Cloud Tourism," or virtual tourism, emerged in China, allowing tourists to explore destinations and museums through streaming platforms (Zeng et al., 2020). Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies were widely adopted to create immersive experiences for audiences at home, such as virtual tours of the Louvre Museum in Paris or the Great Wall of China via VR headsets (Guttentag, 2010).

The Virtual Korean Wave Experience stands out as a prominent example of adaptation during COVID-19. The K-pop group BTS hosted an online concert, "Bang Bang Con: The Live," in June 2020, drawing over 750,000 viewers from 107 countries, setting a new record for live online concert attendance (Yoon et al., 2022). Research on the impact of COVID-19 on the virtual Korean Wave experience found that, despite being virtual, it generated significant value and satisfaction for participants, particularly in fostering emotional connections and a sense of belonging within the fan community (Yoon et al., 2022). However, the same study also concluded that virtual experiences cannot fully replace real travel, especially in terms of atmospheric immersion and on-site interaction.

Post-COVID recovery strategies, implemented from late 2021 onwards, have primarily focused on building resilience and sustainability rather than merely returning to pre-crisis conditions. Several scholars and policymakers have proposed resilience frameworks emphasizing the ability to cope with and recover from crises (Sharma & Nicolau, 2020). These frameworks highlight several key principles: diversifying away from over-reliance on tourism, strengthening local community capacity for self-management of tourism, developing digital infrastructure to support both physical and virtual tourism, and promoting multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making (Hall et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism gained significant traction in the post-COVID era, with an emphasis on minimizing environmental impact, respecting and empowering local communities, and fostering sustainable economic value (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). UNWTO and other international organizations widely adopted the "Build Back Better" concept to encourage countries to reform their tourism systems and address pre-existing issues of overtourism and unsustainable practices (Rowen, 2020). Community-Based Tourism (CBT) was particularly promoted as a model that distributes benefits equitably to local communities, reduces negative impacts, and fosters deeper cultural understanding (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020).

The current situation and trends for 2023-2025 reveal an uneven and complex recovery. International tourism recovery varies by region, with Europe and Asia-Pacific showing faster rebounds than other areas. International tourist arrivals in 2023 returned to approximately 90% of pre-pandemic levels in some regions, but remained significantly lower in others (UNWTO, 2023). Tourist behavior has noticeably shifted, with a greater focus on quality experiences over quantity, a preference for local and short-haul travel, a search for less crowded destinations, and increased interest in sustainability and social responsibility (Phori et al., 2025). The accelerated technological transformation initiated during COVID-19 continues intensely in the post-pandemic period. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used for tourist data analysis, demand forecasting, personalized experiences, and health and safety risk management (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). Concepts like Digital Twin and the Metaverse are still being applied in cultural tourism to create digital replicas of heritage sites accessible globally and used as tools for virtual visit planning (Gretzel et al., 2015; Suanpang et al., 2022). However, new challenges have also emerged, such as the digital divide in developing-country communities lacking access to these technologies, and concerns about privacy and control over tourist data (Gretzel et al., 2020).

Conclusion: Lessons and Future Directions for Cultural Tourism in the 21st Century

The review and analysis of cultural tourism during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025) reveal a complex interplay of growth, crisis, and transformation. Cultural tourism has proven to be one of the most powerful mechanisms for generating economic, social, and cultural value, accounting for approximately 39-40% of all tourism activities globally and contributing about 10% to worldwide GDP and employment. The pre-COVID-19 period was characterized by rapid expansion, with international tourist arrivals increasing from 674 million in 2000 to 1,460 million in 2019. However, this growth was accompanied by severe challenges, including overtourism, cultural commodification, and adverse environmental impacts.

Key findings in the economic and business dimension highlight cultural tourism's significant role in driving economic growth, particularly in developing countries rich in cultural resources. UNESCO World Heritage Sites demonstrate a substantial positive correlation with tourism revenues and employment. The Hallyu Wave phenomenon exemplifies the potential of pop culture to generate economic multipliers across various industries, totaling over 12 billion USD in 2019. However, research also reveals that these economic benefits are often unequally distributed, with large proportions flowing to multinational corporations and major investors. At the same time, local communities receive minimal gains and bear negative externalities.

In the socio-cultural dimension, a critical finding is the inherent tension between tourism development and the preservation of cultural authenticity and identity. The problem of overtourism in cities like Venice, Barcelona, and Dubrovnik illustrates severe adverse effects on residents' quality of life, infrastructure, and cultural heritage. Anti-tourism movements in several cities underscore the imperative of balancing economic development with the rights and well-being of local communities. While the debate over authenticity and commodification continues in academia, there is a growing consensus that local community involvement in decision-making and equitable benefit-sharing are fundamental to sustainable cultural tourism. In the environmental dimension, a concerning finding is that tourism accounts for approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, posing a risk of long-term degradation of cultural heritage. In the technological and innovation dimension, research demonstrates a paradigm shift with the application of digital technologies, particularly AI, AR, VR, and the Metaverse, in cultural heritage presentation, marketing, and destination management. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding the digital divide in developing countries and issues of data privacy.

The most significant lesson from the COVID-19 crisis is the tourism industry's vulnerability to global disruptions. The 74% reduction in international tourist arrivals in 2020 and the 1.3

trillion USD in revenue losses illustrate the magnitude of the industry's impact. However, the crisis also presented a crucial opportunity to reform the tourism structure to be more sustainable and resilient. The acceleration of digital transformation, the emergence of new tourism models such as Cloud Tourism and the Virtual Korean Wave Experience, and the heightened emphasis on sustainable and community-based tourism are vital legacies of the crisis.

Policy and practical recommendations stemming from this study are directed at diverse stakeholders. For public policymakers, it is essential to develop integrated policy frameworks that harmoniously balance economic development with cultural and environmental preservation. Implementing Tourism Carrying Capacity systems is an urgent necessity for managing destinations prone to overtourism. Establishing mechanisms for local community participation in decision-making and equitable benefit sharing should be a foundational principle for all tourism policies. For cultural technology businesses and startups, innovation should respectfully integrate technology with cultural identity, avoiding exploitation or distortion of cultural heritage. Developing socially and environmentally responsible business models is not merely an ethical obligation but also a sound business strategy in an era where tourists increasingly value sustainability.

For UNESCO heritage site managers, the primary challenge lies in balancing conservation with public access, developing efficient visitor management systems, utilizing technology for impact monitoring and assessment, and fostering international cooperation in cross-border heritage management. For academics and researchers, numerous areas warrant further investigation, including the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on tourist behavior and motivations, the relationship between climate change and cultural tourism, the potential and limitations of new technologies in heritage preservation and presentation, and the development of appropriate sustainability indicators and tools tailored to diverse cultural tourism contexts.

In summary, cultural tourism in the first quarter of the 21st century has undergone significant transformations, from rapid growth between 2001 and 2019, through a severe crisis in 2020-2021, and into a period of recovery and structural change from 2022-2025. The future success of cultural tourism will depend on its ability to integrate three core dimensions: creating economic value and distributing benefits equitably, preserving cultural identity and respecting local communities, and managing the environment sustainably to conserve resources for future generations. Cultural tourism in the remaining quarters of the 21st century must strike a balance between leveraging technological innovation to enhance accessibility and experience, while safeguarding the authentic value and meaning of cultural heritage. Success will be measured not solely by tourist numbers or revenue, but by the capacity to create sustainable value for both visitors and the host communities.

References

- Agostino, D., Arnaboldi, M., & Lampis, A. (2022). Italian state museums during the COVID-19 crisis: From onsite closure to online openness. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(4), 362-372.
- Alivizatou, M. (2012). *Intangible heritage and the museum: New perspectives on cultural preservation*. New York: Routledge.
- Altun, O., Kiraz, S., & Saydam, M. (2024). Exploring visitors' motivations and perspectives on festival tourism in Northern Cyprus: Economic, cultural and social dimensions in a post-pandemic era. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 16(4), 485-497.
- Artal-Tur, A., & Correia, A. (2019). New contributions in Tourism Research in the Ibero-American world. *Anatolia*, 30(2), 175-176.
- Bajgier-Kowalska, M., Tracz, M., & Wałach, K. (2017). Role of the Hallyu Wave in the Development of Cultural Tourism in South Korea. *Studies of the Industrial Geography Commission of the Polish Geographical Society*, 31(3), 17-31.

- Berbel-Pineda, J., Palacios-Florencio, B., Ramírez-Hurtado, J., & Santos-Roldán, L. (2021). Gastronomic experience as a factor in tourist motivation. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 18, 100171.
- Bertocchi, D., & Visentin, F. (2019). "The Overwhelmed City": Physical and social over-capacities of global tourism in Venice. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 6937.
- Blake, J. (2008). UNESCO's 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage: The implications of community involvement in 'safeguarding'. In L. Smith & N. Akagawa (eds.). *Intangible heritage* (pp. 45-73). London: Routledge.
- Borowiecki, K., Forbes, N., & Fresa, A. (eds.). (2016). *Cultural heritage in a changing world*. Cham: Springer.
- Brida, J., Cortés-Jiménez, I., & Pulina, M. (2016). Has the tourism-led growth hypothesis been validated? A literature review. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(5), 394-430.
- Buhalis, D., & Leung, R. (2018). Smart hospitality—Interconnectivity and interoperability towards an ecosystem. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 71, 41-50.
- Canaan, R. (2019). Creative economy and cultural heritage: A proposal to tourism development and appreciation of local identity. *Strategic Design Research Journal*, 12(2), 276-288.
- Carbone, F. (2016). An insight into cultural heritage management of tourism destinations. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 14, 75-91.
- Cohen, E. (1988). Authenticity and commoditization in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15(3), 371-386.
- Colomb, C., & Novy, J. (eds.). (2016). *Protest and resistance in the tourist city*. London: Routledge.
- Dube, K. (2021). Implications of COVID-19 induced lockdown on the South African tourism industry and prospects for recovery. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 10(1), 270-287.
- Duxbury, N., & Richards, G. (eds.). (2019). *A research agenda for creative tourism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Duxbury, N., Bakas, F. E., Vinagre de Castro, T., & Silva, S. (2021). Creative Tourism Development Models towards Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism. *Sustainability*, 13(1), 2.
- Fahrissa, T. (2022). Exports driven by Hallyu increasing South Korea's economic growth - Cultural diplomacy approach. *International Journal of Developing and Emerging Economies*, 10(3), 23-37.
- Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creator Economy*. Florida: Creative Class Group.
- Fusté-Forné, F. (2020). Developing cheese tourism: a local-based perspective from Valle de Roncal (Navarra, Spain). *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 7, 26.
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. (2021). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20.
- Gretzel, U., Fuchs, M., Baggio, R., Hoepken, W., Law, R., Neidhardt, J., ... & Xiang, Z. (2020). e-Tourism beyond COVID-19: A call for transformative research. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(2), 187-203.
- Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z., & Koo, C. (2015). Smart tourism: Foundations and developments. *Electronic Markets*, 25, 179-188.
- Guttentag, D. (2010). Virtual reality: Applications and implications for tourism. *Tourism Management*, 31(5), 637-651.
- Guttentag, D. (2015). Airbnb: Disruptive innovation and the rise of an informal tourism accommodation sector. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(12), 1192-1217.
- Hall, C., Scott, D., & Gössling, S. (2020). Pandemics, transformations and tourism: Be careful what you wish for. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 577-598.

- Henriques, C., Guerreiro, M., & Mendes, J. (2017). A framework to the inventory of culture-based tourism products. *E-Journal of Tourism*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after COVID-19. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 610-623.
- Holden, A., & Fennell, D. (eds.). (2013). *The Routledge handbook of tourism and the environment*. London: Routledge.
- Huerta-Viso, P., Llorca Abad, G., & Canós-Darós, L. (2024). Film-Induced Tourism, Destination Branding and Game of Thrones: A Review of the Peñíscola de Cine Project. *Sustainability*, 16(1), 186.
- Ioannides, D., & Gyimóthy, S. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for escaping the unsustainable global tourism path. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 624-632.
- Kang, M., & Schuett, M. (2013). Determinants of sharing travel experiences in social media. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1-2), 93-107.
- Kim, H., Cheng, C. K., & O'Leary, J. (2017). Understanding participation patterns and trends in tourism cultural attractions. *Tourism Management*, 28(5), 1366-1371.
- Lenzen, M., Sun, Y., Faturay, F., Ting, Y., Geschke, A., & Malik, A. (2018). The carbon footprint of global tourism. *Nature Climate Change*, 8, 522-528.
- Lin, X., Shen, Z., Teng, X., & Mao, Q. (2024). Cultural Routes as Cultural Tourism Products for Heritage Conservation and Regional Development: A Systematic Review. *Heritage*, 7(5), 2399-2425.
- Luo, Z. (2025). The Hallyu Multiplier: Analyzing the Synergistic Framework of K-pop's Global Expansion and Economic Impact. *Highlights in Business, Economics and Management*, 65, 84-92.
- MacCannell, D. (1973). Staged authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(3), 589-603.
- Matteucci, X., Koens, K., Calvi, L., & Moretti, S. (2022). Envisioning the futures of cultural tourism. *Futures*, 142, 103013.
- Matzana, V., Oikonomou, A., & Polemis, M. (2022). Tourism Activity as an Engine of Growth: Lessons Learned from the European Union. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 15(4), 177.
- Milano, C., Novelli, M., & Cheer, J. (2018). Overtourism and tourismphobia: A journey through four decades of tourism development, planning and local concerns. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 16(4), 353-357.
- Nair, B. (2025). Riding the BTS Wave: Exploring the Impact of the "BTS" Phenomenon on Tourism in South Korea. In R. Sebastian, N. Kottekkadan, T. Thomas & M. K. (eds.). *Tourism and Easternisation* (pp. 145-155). Singapore: Springer.
- Phori, M., Hermann, U., & Grobbelaar, L. (2025). Travel Behaviour and Tourists' Motivations for Visiting Heritage Tourism Attractions in a Rural Municipality. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 6(5), 260.
- Rattanasirivilai, S. (2023). The Economic Significance of Tourism: Case Study of an ASEAN Country. *PSAKU International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 12(1), 43-56.
- Raymond, C., & Hall, C. (2008). The development of cross-cultural (mis)understanding through volunteer tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(5), 530-543.
- Richards, G., & Marques, L. (2012). Exploring creative tourism: Editors introduction. *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice*, 4(2), 1-11.
- Ritwattanavanich, N., Thoongsuwan, A., & Pavapanunkul, S. (2018). The Scenario Model of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery Business for Preparing a Thai Popular Culture Wave on Medical Tourism. *PSAKU International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 7(1), 96-109.

- Rogerson, C., & Rogerson, J. (2020). COVID-19 tourism impacts in the Global South: Evidence from South Africa. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 31(3), 1083-1091.
- Rowen, I. (2020). The transformational festival as a subversive toolbox for a transformed tourism: Lessons from Burning Man for a COVID-19 world. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 695-702.
- Russo, A., & Scarnato, A. (2018). "Barcelona in common": A new urban regime for the 21st-century tourist city?. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 40(4), 455-475.
- Sæþórsdóttir, A., Hall, C., & Wendt, M. (2020). Overtourism in Iceland: Fantasy or Reality?. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7375.
- Sesana, E., Gagnon, A., Ciantelli, C., Cassar, J., & Hughes, J. (2021). Climate change impacts on cultural heritage: A literature review. *WIREs Climate Change*, 12(4), e710.
- Shao, Y., Huang, S., Wang, Y., Li, Z., & Lou, M. (2020). Evolution of international tourist flows from 1995 to 2018: A network analysis perspective. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 36, 100752.
- Sharma, A., & Nicolau, J. (2020). An open market valuation of the effects of COVID-19 on the travel and tourism industry. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 83, 102990.
- Sharma, G., Thomas, A., & Paul, J. (2021). Reviving tourism industry post-COVID-19: A resilience-based framework. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37, 100786.
- Škrabić Perić, B., Šimundić, B., Muštra, V., & Vugdelija, M. (2021). The Role of UNESCO Cultural Heritage and Cultural Sector in Tourism Development: The Case of EU Countries. *Sustainability*, 13(10), 5473.
- Suanpang, P., Niamsorn, C., Pothipassa, P., Chunhapatragul, T., Netwong, T., & Jermittiparsert, K. (2022). Extensible Metaverse Implication for a Smart Tourism City. *Sustainability*, 14(21), 14027.
- UNCTAD. (2010). *Creative Economy Report 2010*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- UNWTO. (2019). *Guidelines for the Success in the Chinese Outbound Tourism Market*. Madrid: UNWTO.
- UNWTO. (2023). International tourism to end 2023 close to 90% of pre-pandemic levels. *World Tourism Barometer*, 21(4), 1-5.
- Wachsmuth, D., & Weisler, A. (2018). Airbnb and the rent gap: Gentrification through the sharing economy. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 50(6), 1147-1170.
- Wang, N. (1999). Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), 349-370.
- Wu, D., Cao, C., Liu, W., & Chen, J. (2022). Impact of domestic tourism on economy under COVID-19: The perspective of tourism satellite accounts. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*, 3(2), 100055.
- Yang, E., Kim, J., Pennington-Gray, L., & Ash, K. (2021). Does tourism matter in measuring community resilience?. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 89, 103222.
- Yoon, H., Song, C., Ha, M., & Kim, C. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Virtual Korean Wave Experience: Perspective on Experience Economy. *Sustainability*, 14(22), 14806.
- Zeng, Z., Chen, P., & Lew, A. (2020). From high-touch to high-tech: COVID-19 drives robotics adoption. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 724-734.
- Zhang, H. (2022). Analysis of the overall development mode of cultural tourism under the creative economy environment. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022, 3498622.
- Zhao, J., Yang, D., Zhao, X., & Lei, M. (2023). Tourism industry and employment generation in emerging seven economies: Evidence from novel panel methods. *Economic Research*, 36(3), 2206471.

Zhu, J., Airey, D., & Siriphon, A. (2021). Chinese outbound tourism: An alternative modernity perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 87, 103152.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. This is a fully open-access article distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).