

Cultural Tourism and Museums

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“Cultural tourism” is a phenomenon that has gained wide currency in recent decades. A product of demographic, social, and cultural trends, cultural tourism has been identified as a growing and lucrative sector of the tourism industry. Individual organizations and communities have also embraced cultural tourism as a potential economic saviour; as traditional mass employment industries continue to downsize, cities and towns have turned to cultural tourism as a particularly “21st century” generator of economic activity and jobs. Yet there are risks involved as well – environmental degradation, strain on local infrastructure, and the so-called “Disneyfication” or commodification of treasured cultural resources are some of the potential side effects of increased numbers of tourists to a particular destination.

First we must define the term: what exactly is meant by “cultural tourism”? There are numerous definitions of cultural tourism – many of which focus on a particular area of interest or key issue within the broad concept. LORD Cultural Resources Planning & Management Inc., the internationally known museum and cultural planning firm, of which I am Vice President, has conducted a significant amount of research into the trend as part of its work with museums, galleries, and other cultural organizations, and has a broad perspective on the topic. LORD defines cultural tourism as:

“Visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group, or institution.”¹

From this definition, it can be seen that cultural tourism activities may encompass many different types of experience. While many of those can be categorized narrowly to include such activities as visiting historic sites, museums or galleries, and attending performing arts events, they can also include aspects of other streams of tourist activity, such as “eco-tourism”, “edu-tourism”, “heritage-tourism”, “adventure-tourism” and “agro-tourism”. Indeed, cultural tourism can also include such activities as shopping, dining, and similar means of experiencing a community’s culture.

¹ Except where noted, this definition and the data in this section is drawn from LORD Cultural Resources Planning & Management, Inc., “Strategic Directions for Ontario’s Cultural Tourism Product”, 1993, and its 1999 update.

The key concept underlying each of these streams, and particularly cultural tourism, is that the experiences offered to tourists must be fundamentally *authentic*. This search for authenticity is related to a broader search for *enrichment* and *meaning* in leisure experiences. The authentic, therefore, allows people to make a profound connection to an increasingly incomprehensible world.

Authentic resources can be defined as sites, services, or events which reflect local, regional or national heritage. Authenticity can be determined according to several criteria. For example, a heritage resource may exhibit features which existed during its period of significance, or be associated with historic events, persons, architectural or engineering design, or technology. The resource may not retain every culturally significant feature, but it should retain those specifically related to its historic identity or its relationship to cultural tradition. In sum, authentic experiences are those with *meaning*. An assessment of cultural resources in terms of significance and authenticity is the first step in the development of a cultural tourism program.

Communities with authentic cultural resources – and there are very few without – can, with proper management of the resources, benefit in various ways. For example, cultural tourism development can:

- Provide a vehicle for cultural exchange and understanding;
- Stimulate conservation and heritage preservation efforts;
- Revitalize traditional building and craft industries;
- Generate economic activity and local or regional development;
- Enhance community cohesiveness and pride in cultural identity.

The first three potential benefits are closely related. As a vehicle for cultural exchange and understanding, cultural tourism can provide a visitor with a mix of entertaining and educational experiences of another community, region, group, or institution. And, since it is most important that these experiences be authentic, the need for the “real thing” drives conservation and heritage preservation and the survival of traditional building and craft skills.

The economic benefits of cultural tourism are in some respects obvious: the direct and spinoff effects of a cultural tourism project can be quite substantial, and cultural tourism can add significant (and sometimes much-needed) diversity to a regional economy. Benefits relate directly to the profile of cultural tourists: on average, they have higher incomes and are more educated than other travelers, which translates into more money spent per visit and longer stays.

The benefits of cultural tourism are contingent on prudent resource management. Without proper attention to community needs, conservation, accessibility, and a host of other factors, communities or organizations run the risk of setting up an unsustainable situation. Uncontrolled tourism and development can undermine the heritage value of cultural resources; not only does unbridled development have the power to destroy the landscape with inappropriate infrastructure, it may also force indigenous populations off their traditional lands and facilitate degradation of fragile cultural and natural resources. Moreover, local residents are sometimes overlooked and fail to benefit from development. Therefore the participation of indigenous populations and local communities living within or adjacent to heritage sites is crucial to responsible management and conservation. This helps to ensure that a balance between maximizing the economic and social benefits and safeguarding the site and maintaining social and cultural traditions is achieved.

Some of the most important new trends that will impact cultural tourism are as follows:

Increasing popularity of short, “getaway” holidays: The educated, professional people that make up the bulk of the cultural tourism marketplace have busy lives, with little time left over for rest and recreation. Quick, “getaway” holidays are a very attractive option for this market. This trend is closely related to increasing mobility of people, money, capital, ideas, images, information, objects, and technologies. Cultural tourism operators have a clear opportunity to respond to this trend by providing overnight or weekend packages, preferably in partnership with a local hotel or travel provider. Moreover, since these cultural tourists are looking for many different types of experience on their trips, the importance of packaging and partnerships to provide a “total visitor experience” of a destination cannot be overstated. In Korea this might not only involve professionals from Seoul seeking a “get-away” to the South, but also could mean Taiwanese or Japanese tourists coming to Korea for short stays.

Growing importance of Adventure- and Eco-Tourism: Cultural tourists are increasingly aware of environmental issues and often seek out environmentally sensitive activities. Thus careful management and responsible stewardship of cultural heritage sites is not only a moral (and often legal) responsibility, but is also an opportunity for tourism operators, communities, and regions to bolster the market by demonstrating their commitment to environmental issues.

In addition, while cultural tourists are typically older, the new cultural tourism streams are becoming increasingly attractive to the youth market. “Traditional” cultural attractions such as museums tend to have difficulties attracting youth and young adults. Yet there is a real opportunity for cultural tourism to serve this market by offering low-cost, dynamic options that respond to the values that are important to them, such as environmental sustainability, cultural sensitivity, adventure, and physical fitness.

Experiential vs. Object-Based Tourism: Cultural tourists are increasingly seeking *experiences* rather than *objects*. Much of this trend is related to an increasing propensity for tourists to seek experiences that are subjective, or meaningful to them personally (as opposed to the destination’s intrinsic or objective significance). Attractions associated with childhood nostalgia, such as the proposed Museum of Korean Songs, are well positioned to take advantage of this trend; those that are apparently less well positioned can provide innovative, interactive programming to provide the types of experiences sought by visitors.

This trend is also reflected in the increasing popularity of food and themed shopping experiences, interactive museum programs and exhibits, and immersive environments and “high-tech” presentation technologies such as large-format theatres. Not only are these types of experiences more fun for the visitor, but each promotes *affective learning* – learning sparks an interest in visitors and encourages them to develop that interest after leaving the attraction.

The Changing Face of Museums : Museums have been evolving in ways that reflect the growing concerns and interests of the population. One way in which museums have changed is to empower traditionally marginalized groups: for example, the emergence of what can be termed “First Voice” museums allow specific peoples the opportunity to collect, preserve, express, display and demonstrate their culture from their own viewpoint and in their own ways rather than in the context of a traditional arts or natural history museum. “The Story of the Filipino People”, the new exhibition that we designed in consultation with the National Museum of the Philippines, is an example in Manila.

Another example is a powerful new type of museum – the “idea museum” – which deals with significant issues common to all humans, such as war and peace, human rights, or globalization. These museums challenge the visitor to take a stand and make a difference. They tend to be much less object- or collection-based than traditional museums and therefore respond to the trend toward experiential as opposed to object-based tourism. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles is a popular example.

Not only are the stories and experiences that are offered changing, but so are the way the public thinks of museum spaces. Some recent, high profile museum projects – one instantly thinks of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao building – illustrate the trend towards signature architecture, in which the building itself becomes an attraction. Such projects are also related to city and regional revitalization projects, in which government often plays a large role. The new National Museum under construction here in Seoul offers such an opportunity.

Convergence Between “Popular” and “High” Culture: The rise of museums such as the Experience Music Project in Seattle and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, or the planned Museum of Korean Song, reflects a shift in our understanding of “culture”. Once clearly delineated from the popular mainstream, many “high-end” cultural attractions now deal with themes that were once considered outside their proper scope. This trend may be partially related to the need for the museums to boost attendance levels by appealing to a broader market, not only for financial reasons, but also to to be as relevant and responsive to the community in which they are located as possible. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum, which we planned and designed over an 8-year period, is an outstanding example, linking traditional Chinese culture with Hong Kong homes, toys, music and movies.

Growth of the Internet and the Impact of Technology: Statistics documenting the increasing importance of the internet in travel planning are readily available. As stated in a previous essay in this series, analysts predict that some \$30 billion in leisure travel will be booked on-line by 2003. Use of the internet is an opportunity that can easily be leveraged if effective strategies are employed: for example, tourism websites should offer prospective visitors an integrated virtual tour of the area or the attraction, showing the diversity of experience – not only cultural attractions, but also shopping, dining, nightlife, parks, and whatever else the community has to offer, since visitors want a variety of experiences when they travel. Also, one of the keys to successful tourism promotion is to provide the visitor with a seamless planning experience – the prospective tourist must find it easy to plan accommodations, car rentals, and visits to attractions all at once – “one-stop tourism shopping”. The internet is very well suited to this.

Web sites for museums need to be planned to facilitate a cultural tourists’ on-going awareness of the museum—from before his or her visit to follow-up programs after the visit, thus sustaining the visitor’s interest and ensuring positive ‘word-of-mouth’ publicity.

A cultural tourism product is created anytime a travel motivator (the existence of attractions such as a specific event or institution) interacts with a tourist’s personal motivator (an interest in heritage, the arts or culture). Cultural tourism products can be those that are especially created for the visitor (for example a museum) or they may simply be inherent in the community (restaurants and streetscapes for example). These groups of cultural products may also be linked; cultural institutions that are located in a heritage district or downtown may easily become the focal point for community-based festivals and special events.

There are several ways in which cultural tourism products can be categorized. Perhaps the most straightforward way is in terms of *theme*. In this case, cultural tourism products would include, but may not be restricted to:

- Heritage/History/Architecture;
- Natural History/Wildlife;
- Fine and Performing Arts/Festivals;
- Archaeology/Anthropology/Indigenous Cultures;
- Environmental Education/Nature Based.

Another way in which products can be categorized is in terms of *organizational type*:

- **Institutional:** Museums, galleries, historic sites, theatres, performing arts centres, science centres.
- **Lifestyle/Heritage:** Heritage/themed districts, streetscapes, monuments, customs, language, gastronomy.
- **Events:** Festivals, fairs, special events, exhibitions, competitions.

With regard to organizational type, the category into which a particular cultural tourism product falls has an effect on the ways in which it can take advantage of market trends. For example, museums can respond to the trend towards shorter, getaway trips by partnering individually with hotels or providing special weekend passes, while communities with stewardship over historic districts or streetscapes might organize city- or region-wide tourism coalitions aimed at providing a comprehensive or “total” experience for the same short-stay visitor. The point is that each category will approach the opportunities generated by cultural tourism in a different way.

It is clear that the better the cultural product, the greater the likelihood that tourists will visit and spend money within a region, province or country. Even more important in Korea is the ability of cultural products to attract or increase the length of stay of long-haul tourists because they bring in new money to the region. Thus there are significant benefits to improving the quality of cultural products in any community and the ability of the product to attract these tourists.

The ability to do so directly relates to the following eight points which serve as a type of checklist to help cultural products to evaluate their own degree of product readiness:

- **Perceived quality of the product** - relative to other products, the product must be perceived to be of high quality to attract the cultural tourist.
- **Awareness** - by increasing the degree of awareness of your attraction you increase its potential audience. Simple signage and brochures are basic means of generating awareness and visibility. Packaging with other products also helps to increase exposure to your product.
- **Customer service attitude** - even a product of outstanding quality may not be able to overcome the negative impact of poor customer service. A commitment to customer service involves policies and procedures that put the customer first, such as operating schedules that are more convenient for visitors than for staff, availability of qualified staff during peak visitor hours, and adequate training for front-line staff so that they are capable of attending to visitors in a helpful, efficient, and professional manner.
- **Sustainability** – a successful cultural tourism product must be developed with the intent of sustaining it over time. The key to this sustainability is a product in harmony with the community’s values and commitment to maintain its own heritage and environment. A cultural tourism product that is in conflict with these values and aspirations or which overwhelms them will likely not achieve success. Harmony with the local community is especially important in Korea.
- **Extent to which product is perceived to be unique or special** – many tourists are looking for “something different to do” while on vacation; that is why they travel as opposed to spending their vacation at home. If cultural tourists are able to have an identical cultural experience in their home community, there is no incentive to take part in this activity while on vacation. The cultural attraction that has an image of somehow being bigger, better or different will likely have a greater appeal to the cultural consumer who is far from home. Korea’s unique culture gives your museums a distinct advantage here.

- **Convenience** – in the competition among destinations, convenience is a critical success factor. Being convenient to tourists includes ensuring ease of purchase, providing adequate, safe parking particularly for buses operating with a convenient and flexible schedule, providing accessible washroom facilities, and offering advanced scheduling of events, exhibits and shows along with appropriate pricing commitments.
- **Community support and involvement** – community support and involvement (for both human and financial resources) can greatly contribute to the success of a cultural tourism product. Your community can be a strong ally in reaching the tourist market, by generating positive word of mouth, influencing the choices of visiting friends and relatives, and offering complementary services or products.
- **Management commitment and capability** – becoming a cultural attraction that is successful at attracting the cultural tourism market begins with an institutional decision to make the market a priority. Without this type of commitment it will not be possible to realize the full potential of this attractive market. Management commitment includes such measures as the development of marketing/business plans specific to target markets, and the direction of funds and human resources necessary to contribute to a sustained marketing effort.

While “able” products have most or all of these characteristics, at the other end of the spectrum are cultural products that are currently unable to attract visitors from outside the local region, but which have established this as a goal – these are **"willing"** to participate in the cultural tourism marketplace but have yet to establish the means by which to do so. These products may be those that have not yet reached a level of success in several of the eight areas identified above but are working towards these as a goal. In the middle of the spectrum are those products that are not only willing but also **"ready"** to make a commitment to enhance their product and services.

Cultural Tourism Product Continuum



Strategic Direction moves product toward Export-ability

While a key element in any successful cultural tourism strategy is therefore to move more cultural products in the right direction from being "willing" to "ready" to "able", it should be noted that not all tourism products with the potential to move along the spectrum should do so. The degree to which a cultural product is made accessible to cultural tourism is essentially a community decision – or should be. This factor of self-determination is critical to both the authenticity of the product (ultimately its sustainability in terms of community cultural identity) and to its effective marketing (also ultimately its sustainability as a tourism product). Examples of products that might not wish to move along the spectrum include sensitive historic sites or buildings that cannot sustain heavy tourist traffic or products of a sensitive nature to a particular First Voice culture (such as temples or other religious sites).

In developing a cultural tourism strategy it is also advisable that there be a mechanism, or agency, to provide leadership in the evaluation of the products, to facilitate their development from "willing" to "ready" to "able". This will involve provision of training, assistance with preparation of business plans, and participation in development partnerships outside the cultural sector to create the necessary product mix.

To attract cultural tourists, the museums must understand their motivation to travel. Just as not every cultural product is willing, ready or able to attract tourists, not every person is interested in culture. In reality, there are different degrees of consumer motivation for cultural tourism that many tourism surveys have not taken into account. The broadest definition of cultural tourism includes those who are motivated only *in part* by culture.

The concentric circles shown in the slide illustrate the phenomenon of varying motivation for culture. At the centre, the smallest circle, are persons **"greatly motivated"** by culture. That would involve the people who travel to a city specifically because of its theatre opportunities, museums and cultural festivals for example. However, this segment is fairly small – it can be estimated at about 5% of the resident market and 15% of tourists from outside the immediate region. The difference in the figures for residents and tourists is explained by the fact that the higher education/income persons most likely to travel also tend to be more interested in culture.

The second circle represents persons motivated **"in part"** by culture. This includes persons who travel to a particular destination both because of the cultural opportunities and for unrelated reasons - perhaps to visit friends or relatives. Those motivated in part account for about 15% of the resident market and 30% of the tourist market.

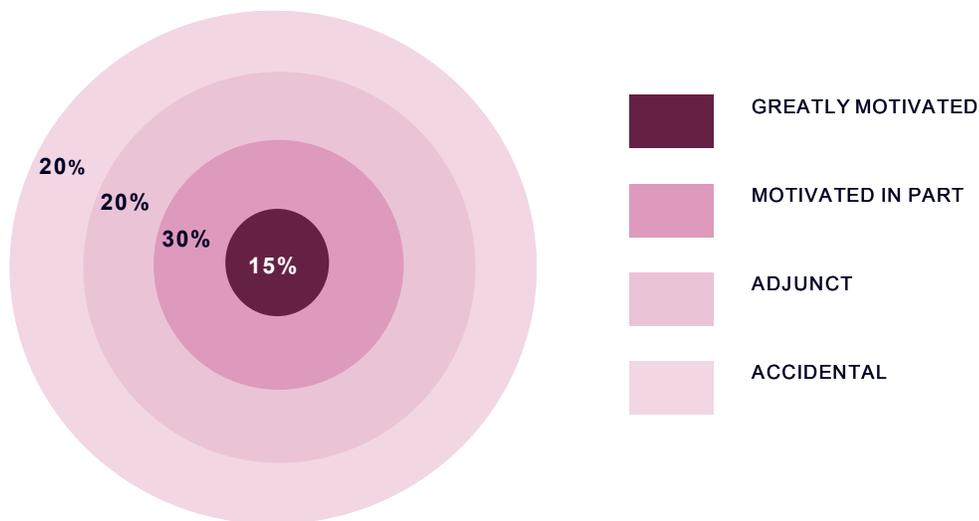
The third circle, which represents about 20% of both markets, involves people for whom culture is an **"adjunct"** to another main motivation. That is, the main motivation for choosing to visit the destination might be non-cultural – perhaps a sports event or other recreational opportunity - but while there, these visitors will plan to include cultural opportunities (the relationship between this group and the trend towards short "get-away" trips is significant).

The outer circle refers to the **"accidental cultural tourist,"** also about 20% of resident and tourist markets. This group includes people traveling to a destination who do not intend to go to a cultural attraction or event but find, for example, that the friends or relatives they have visited bring them along or that the cultural opportunity is close to their hotel. Attendance is not planned, but is accidental.

Outside the circles, representing about 40% of the resident market and 15% of tourists, are **persons who would not attend a cultural attraction** or event under any circumstances.

Whereas the strategy for cultural products is to move more of them along the continuum from willing to ready to able, the strategy for increasing the market for cultural products focuses on widening the appeal of culture from the small percentage greatly motivated to larger percentages motivated in part, as an adjunct to another motivation, or to accidental cultural tourists.

The Four Categories of Cultural Tourism



Thus, while the strategy for *cultural products* is to move more of them along the continuum from willing to ready to able, the strategy to widen the *cultural market* is to widen the appeal of culture across the spectrum of motivation from the small percentages greatly motivated by culture to the larger percentages motivated in part, as an adjunct or even as an “accidental” cultural tourist.

In other words, creating a cultural tourism destination takes strategic planning built on an understanding that there are different degrees of consumer motivation for culture and that most people are looking for a variety of things to do when they travel. People may travel to a city because of business or a convention, to visit friends and relatives, because of specific city amenities or for many other reasons. They may not be particularly interested in culture but would attend an attraction or event if made aware of the opportunities, if it were convenient and offered good value for time and money spent. But for most heritage organizations and facilities, meeting these needs of tourists is easier said than done. Heritage organizations often do not have the financial resources to be able to build awareness, create the conditions where it is truly convenient for tourists to visit, and offer the value for time and money spent in an increasingly competitive tourist marketplace.

Therefore, the approach of using packaging, partnership and promotion to create cultural and non-cultural opportunities in one place or at one time becomes critical to creating a strong cultural tourism destination. Packaging, partnering and promotion strategies help tourism and heritage operations reach not only the 15% “greatly motivated” cultural tourists but to reach the whole range – the 85% of non-resident pleasure travelers who have the potential to participate in cultural activities. As has been explained, the cultural tourism market is very large - - but the issue is one of degree. Successful promotion and packaging can expand the market substantially by attracting travelers interested in culture to a lesser degree. Promotional activities increase consumer *motivation* to participate in cultural activities, while packaging increases *exposure* to cultural activities on behalf of a broader group of visitors. A brief explanation of each strategy is as follows:

- **Packaging:** Packaging both within the market of available cultural products in a community and cross packaging with other kinds of tourism attractions can create a more attractive cultural tourism destination for a larger market of tourists. Packaging is the combining of experiences and attractions under one "ticket price" or trip that includes a variety of locations.
- **Partnerships:** Often, tourism agencies are possessed of the means and/or the expertise to assist cultural attractions in putting together packages and in understanding their potential tourist market. Cultural attractions and local tourism agencies can, and must, become true partners in realizing a community's heritage tourism potential.
- **Promotion:** Understanding the needs of both current and potential consumers of cultural products is critical to providing a saleable product. There is more to marketing than placing articles in newspapers -- successful marketing efforts include as much listening as promoting. Linking promotions directly to the travel motivators and market profile of potential cultural tourists is also critical.

However, not all partnerships and packaging opportunities are equally beneficial to tourism or heritage operators. There are three distinct types of partnership and packaging opportunities:

The most common is among **cultural products of the same type** because it is the easiest to accomplish. For example, a packaging relationship between an art museum and another art museum would fall into this category. A common strategy here is the so-called passport promotion, in which visitors are given passports that one stamped as they visit each partner museum. While there are benefits to this type of packaging - - reduced competition among cultural products, extended length of stay and spending - - packages such as the passport concept appeal to the 15% of pleasure travelers who are already “greatly motivated” cultural tourists. The reality is that most people seek greater variety when they travel. A passport type of package is not going to motivate an “adjunct” cultural tourist so much as benefit those who were “greatly motivated” in the first place.

The second form of partnership and packaging involves **cultural products of different types**. For example: festivals, arts districts and performing arts. Advantages of these approaches are: they create a wider level of appeal to more people, they reduce competition among cultural products, increase efficiency of product delivery by concentrating the products, and increase perceived value for time and money spent. These strategies help to reach market segments that are motivated only in part by cultural tourism.

But by far the most important form of partnering and packaging is among **cultural and non-cultural products**. Only through this strategy can the high-end benefits of cultural tourism be maximized without incurring huge marketing costs. Examples of this might be packaging based on the day of the week such as a weekend package in which a hotel includes free or discounted tickets to cultural attractions or events. Or packages may be based on the time of day whereby an afternoon bus tour to a museum is packaged with an evening musical performance, extending visitor stay by a few hours or even a night. Museums make excellent partners in these packages because they can be flexible in opening hours, can be the focal point of themed festivals and often provide theatre and auditorium facilities in communities and gift shops that can be outlets for local artists and craftspersons.

Partnering and Packaging Model

	Among Cultural Products of the Same Type	Among Different Cultural Product Types	Among Cultural and Non-Cultural Products
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport packages • Themed packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals and special events • Arts districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day of the week • Weather • Time of day • Specific market segments
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces competition • Extends length of stay and spending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces competition • Increases efficiency of delivery • Increases perceived value • Extends the Market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaches the broadest market • Extends tourism season • Benefits tourism operators
Impact	Limited – appeals to “greatly motivated” tourists	Moderate – attracts “motivated in part” and “adjunct” tourists	Broad – reaches “motivated in part”, “adjunct” and “accidental” cultural tourists

Clearly, the key to widening the cultural tourism market and increasing the positive impact on both cultural attractions and communities is partnership between cultural and non-cultural attractions. This means that museum professionals must identify existing resources in their areas and develop packages highlighting natural and cultural heritage with products such as sports, recreation events, restaurants, hotels and retail areas as active partners. Successful partnerships will require a repositioning of the relationship of culture to other tourism operators to move beyond "what can you do for me" with sponsorships, memberships and donations, to also include "what can I do for you" given the profile and importance of the cultural tourist. Knowing what culture has to offer and communicating it effectively to potential partners in the tourism industry may therefore help to move their perception of donations and sponsorships away from philanthropy and toward investment. And all of this will help to ensure that the benefits of cultural tourism are realized broadly, across the host community, and in a sustainable way.