Cultural Tourism

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"Cultural tourism" could be defined as tourism that focuses on cultural attractions and activities as a primary motivating factor for travel. Notwithstanding the broad definitions of culture that abound within postmodern and populist writings, parameters need to be drawn around what is defined as "culture" in this context. It is therefore useful to break the concept of cultural tourism down into a number of subsets. As argued by Smith (2003: 29), "cultural tourism can no longer be considered as a special interest or niche sector, but instead as an umbrella term for a range of tourism typologies and diverse activities which have a cultural focus."

Richards (2001: 7) suggests that cultural tourism covers the consumption not just of "the cultural products of the past," but also of contemporary culture or the "way of life" of a people or region. Hughes (1996), (2000) differentiates between "universal," "wide," "narrow," and "sectorized" cultural tourism. These definitions correspond broadly to perceiving culture as a whole way of life; to engaging with specific ethnic or indigenous groups; to experiencing the "artistic and intellectual" activities of a society; to visiting specific heritage attractions or arts venues. Cultural tourism encompasses heritage (both tangible and intangible), the arts (including festivals and events), and contemporary culture insofar as it relates to the lifestyles and traditions of a people or place. Cultural tourism is not simply about the passive consumption of heritage attractions or attendance of festivals, it can also involve a high degree of interaction with local people, as well as the pursuit of creative activities (e.g., painting, photography, dance). Indeed, Richards and Raymond (2000) suggest that creative tourism is becoming a growth subsector within cultural tourism.

As the demand for tourism increases, so apparently does the demand for cultural tourism, which appears to have grown exponentially in recent years. For example, McKercher and Cros (2002) estimate that as many as 240 million international journeys annually involve some element of cultural tourism. This may have something to do with broadening definitions of culture, as well as the apparent diversification of tourist interests (Sigala & Leslie 2005). The cultural tourist could be described as a tourist who is better educated than average (Richards 1996), and generally concerned with knowledge-seeking and self-improvement, thus the inner journey is likely to be as important as the outer journey. Cultural tourists actively seek difference and authentic and spontaneous (rather than "staged" or contrived) interaction with local people and places (Smith 2003). Tourism may often be described as "travel" whereby the cultural tourist elevates him/herself to the level of an adventurer or explorer. This is particularly the case in the context of indigenous and ethnic tourism. For this reason, cultural tourism has become increasingly politicized, and has sometimes been accused of being imperialistic, Eurocentric, or voyeuristic (Smith & Robinson 2006). However, cultural tourists are by no means homogeneous, neither in terms of motivations nor profiles. For example, McKercher and Cros (2002) differentiate between tourists for whom culture is a primary motivating factor ("purposeful") and those who are "serendipitous" or "incidental."

Cultural tourism can be subdivided into a number of typologies for the sake of greater definitional clarity, the facilitation of research, and product development.

HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism focuses on tangible artifacts from the past, including historical monuments, archaeological sites, religious sites, and museums. This includes World Heritage Sites, of which there are now over 750 (including the Taj Mahal in India and the Pyramids in Egypt). Intangible heritage is also an important resource (e.g., the traditions, lifestyles, arts and crafts of local

people). The interpretation and representation of heritage can be complex and contentious (e.g., concentration camps such as Auschwitz in Poland; Robben Island in post-apartheid South Africa). Many heritage sites suffer from over-visitation (e.g., Stonehenge in the UK; Ephesus in Turkey), therefore conservation and visitor management issues are of primary concern for this form of cultural tourism.

ARTS TOURISM

Arts tourism focuses on the visual arts (e.g., galleries) as well as performance (e.g., theaters, concerts) and other experiential forms of activity (e.g., festivals and events). There are some concerns that tourism can dilute or "trivialize" the arts. Many ethnic and indigenous art forms (e.g., Caribbean carnivals, Asian Mela festivals, Aboriginal arts and crafts, Andalucian flamenco dancing) are becoming more popular on a global scale, so care needs to be taken to ensure that they are not overcommodified.

CREATIVE TOURISM

Creative tourism involves tourists undertaking creative activities such as painting, pottery making, glass blowing, weaving, photography, and wood carving, either under the guidance of or independently of local people (e.g., with a tour operator). In many cases, creative tourism may be a subsidiary activity rather than a primary motivating factor, although growing numbers of tour operators are now offering special interest tours focused on creative activities (e.g., salsa holidays in Cuba, watercolor painting in Provence, cookery in Tuscany).

URBAN CULTURAL TOURISM

Urban cultural tourism focuses on city activities, which may include certain forms of heritage or arts tourism. Historic cities (e.g., Venice, Prague, Oxford) attract large numbers of international tourists. However, increasingly, cultural tourists are being drawn to deindustrialized cities that are being regenerated (e.g., Glasgow, Bilbao,

Rotterdam). They may experience cultural mega-events (e.g., expos) or visit "flagship" museums (e.g., the Guggenheim in Bilbao) or whole new cultural quarters or waterfronts (e.g., Barcelona, Cardiff).

RURAL CULTURAL TOURISM

Rural cultural tourism may incorporate aspects of indigenous or ethnic tourism, or creative activities. In some cases attractions have been purpose-built to help develop tourism (e.g., eco-museums in France and Scandinavia; holistic centers in Ireland, Greece, and Spain). In others, former industrial sites such as coal mines have been regenerated and turned into attractions. For example, Blaenavon in Wales, Ironbridge in the English Midlands, and the Wieliczka salt mines in Poland have all been designated World Heritage Sites. Spinoffs from agro- or farm tourism include gastronomic tourism, arts and crafts tourism, not to mention wine tourism (e.g., in the Douro Valley in Portugal; Stellenbosch in South Africa).

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TOURISM

In this type of tourism, tourists visit indigenous peoples in their own habitat, although in many cases land has been taken from such peoples and they are forced to live in reservations (e.g., North American Indians) or to integrate into mainstream society (e.g., Australian Aborigines, Canadian Inuits). Tourists are generally interested in the lifestyles and traditions of indigenous groups, and may stay with families in their village (e.g., in Indonesian jungles or the Tunisian desert). Trekking and staying with tribal groups is popular in countries like Thailand or the countries of Central and South America. The environmental and sociocultural impacts can be significant, although cultural tourism can also help to raise the profile of indigenous groups and contribute to the renewal of traditions and cultural pride.

POPULAR CULTURAL TOURISM

This form of tourism focuses on some of the more "populist" forms of culture, such as attending

sporting events or pop concerts, and visiting shopping malls and theme parks. It may also include visits to film or television locations or studios. In many regenerated former industrial cities, such attractions are proliferating and are often combined with more traditional forms of cultural tourism (e.g., art galleries, architectural features, museums).

The boundaries of cultural tourism are clearly being pushed further and further toward more global and contemporary forms of culture. Although a recognition of definitional and conceptual boundaries is important, the postmodern dedifferentiation of tourism, culture, leisure, and lifestyles can render this a somewhat elusive task.

SEE ALSO: Consumption, Tourism and; Culture; Culture Industries; Leisure; Leisure and Popular Culture; Museums; Postmodern Culture; Urban Tourism

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