

Tourism

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The word “tourist” was first used in English in 1780 and “tourism” appears in an English dictionary in 1811; the French words *touriste* and *tourisme* appeared only in 1816 and 1841. However, the root-word “tour” was of French origin (derived from Latin *tornus*, cf. “turn”). In France, the new meaning of “tour” as “voyage” or “trip” appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century: it is with this meaning that the word passed into English at the end of the seventeenth century. The words “tourism” and “tourist” were first officially used in 1937 by the League of Nations.

It is difficult however to say exactly when tourism was born. During the Middle Ages, pilgrimages were the most common form of organized travel. The routes, often long and dangerous, converged upon the holy places of Christendom – Santiago, Rome, Jerusalem – but only rudimentary accommodation was offered. The ‘Grand Tour’, which became popular in Europe since the seventeenth century and reached its peak during the eighteenth century, was an almost institutionalized journey undertaken by young, mainly English, aristocrats, with the purpose of completing their education. The boom of spas and the rise of seaside or mountain holiday resorts influenced the subsequent evolution of tourism, making it accessible to a wider public. In the nineteenth century, tourism had become a phenomenon on a European scale, although most scholars agree that England was the country where modern tourism was born: in 1841, Thomas Cook inaugurated organized tourism by transporting 570 people by train from Leicester to Loughborough. The transport revolution has ensured an ever widening availability of travel opportunities since then.

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism “comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”. Tourism inherently involves travel, by whatever type of transportation (even on foot, even in more developed societies: pilgrims, hikers, modern *flâneurs*). But all travel is not tourism. In the narrowest sense, tourism means “travel from one’s usual place of residence, without precise objectives and for a pre-determined and limited period of time”. More broadly speaking, it also covers all the component elements – tangible and intangible – that make it possible and link it to the presence of certain services, commercial enterprises and facilities (means of transport, accommodation facilities, tour operators, travel agencies, but also public and cultural institutions).

Conventionally tourism is viewed and studied as an economic resource – and tourism today is in fact one of the most important world industries and a crucial resource for many countries. But it is also a historical and social phenomenon with complex origins, manifestations and effects, and whose cultural and aesthetic impact is witnessed by, and intertwined with, literature and art. Recently, scholars have addressed tourism as a cultural practice: “By enabling people and groups to travel, tourism is first of all a powerful cultural agent, an opportunity for establishing relationships and comparing languages, economies and experiences” (Bonadei 1999: 27). A considerable amount of study nowadays is devoted to tourist motivation. According to Robinson (1976: 157), tourism is driven by the binary opposition between the ordinary and the extraordinary. However, this opposition can take on many forms, such as the fact of carrying on one’s ordinary activities but doing so in an unusual context (Urry 1982: 30). In this perspective Barthes (1957; thinking of the Parisian *banlieues*) could speak of ‘exotic’ tourism performed by citizens within their own cities.

Tourism, a leisure-time activity that finds historically and culturally rooted in pilgrimage, travel and sightseeing, has been an object of representation: literature, figurative arts and travel writing are the tourist’s companions, in describing, depicting and narrating places and people. Tourism also generates, and makes use of, a body of representations that invoke and create images, commonplaces and ethnotypes, myths, illusions, destinations, motivations. Travel writing and landscape painting represent verbally and pictorially the travel experience, and in turn a host of literary and pictorial images precede and pre-figure the travel. The link between travel and representation has always been strong (Brilli 1997), and entails tourism, in its constructing destinations out of places and motivations out of the desire for experiences and encounters. Tourism, moreover, is deeply embedded in today’s media-oriented culture.

It has connections with the press, cinema, television and popular music: "In time, through advertising and the media, images construct a closed system of information, illusions, clichés, that is self-perpetuating and constitutes the basis for the choice by future tourists of their potential destinations" (Urry 1982: 24).

Nowadays, it is more appropriate to speak of 'tourisms', in the plural; each individual can freely choose to engage in forms of organized or self-made tourism, and can enjoy opportunities of thematic tourism: hence, we speak of sun-and-sea tourism, sexual, naturalistic, gastronomic and sporting tourism. Additionally, forms of 'eco-sustainable' tourism, which aspire to limit the negative impact of tourism at both the environmental and socio-economic levels, are becoming more common.

Of particular relevance in the present context is the variant known as cultural tourism. According to the definition given by the World Tourism Organization in 1995, "cultural tourism in its literal meaning includes the movement of people driven by a motivation of a cultural nature, such as that which motivates travel for study, visits to museums or monuments, pilgrimages and participation in artistic or folklore events. In a broader meaning, we can include under this heading all forms of movement in space of individuals or groups, because they satisfy the human need to confront diversity, they tend to raise the level of knowledge, and they generate new experiences and new meetings." Cultural heritage tourism (or just heritage tourism) is a branch of tourism oriented towards the heritage appreciation. Heritage tourism is important for various reasons; it has a positive economic and social impact, it establishes and reinforces identity, it helps preserve the cultural heritage, with culture as an instrument it facilitates harmony and understanding among people, it supports culture and helps renew the tourism enterprise (Richards 1996). Heritage tourism involves visiting historical or industrial sites that may include old canals, railways, battlegrounds, etc. The overall purpose is to gain an appreciation of the past. It also refers to the marketing of a location to members of a diaspora in search of family roots.

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Copy-edited by Wiesje on 21-11-2006

edited Joep 13 jan 2007

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