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# 16 Authenticity and aesthetics of global tourists' experiences

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### **The objectives of this chapter are to:**

- Discover what people really want from travel;
- Introduce the features of an authentic and aesthetic tourist experience;
- Consider the relationship between authenticity and aesthetics in tourism.

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**Keywords:** authenticity, aesthetics, tourist experience, global tourist

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## **Introduction**

Globalization has brought together an immense aggregation of fashionable, and sometimes competing, discourses on politics, economics, sociology, psychology and tourism. Expressions like 'global village', 'global culture' and 'global tourism' are appearing. Global changes in tourism are accelerating with the development of transportation and information technology. The globalization of tourism has resulted in more culturally diverse travelers with different preferences, motivations, expectations, needs, desires, and so on (Kaynak and Uysal, 2012). The performative dimension and the engagement of the various senses have become increasingly significant in the tourism industry (Sjöholm, 2010). Many people all over the world are choosing to holiday outside their own country and are pursuing novel and exotic experiences. As such, the number of global tourists is exponentially increasing. At the same time, the importance of tourists' emotional experiences is gradually coming to the forefront. So, what experiences do people

expect from, and pursue through, tourism? If it is a different kind of experience from everyday life, what does this mean? It could be that tourists are choosing to travel to exotic destinations simply to remove themselves from the humdrum of daily life. If this is so, it suggests the authentic and aesthetic experience of the tourism object or destination.

Authenticity has become especially important in tourism as patterns are changing from simple pleasure-seeking experiences to the pursuit of the novel and exotic. Zhang (2008) suggested that authenticity is a dynamic, multi-faceted and complicated issue that should concentrate on the tourist experience from the viewpoint of the subject, rather than simply emphasizing the metrics of the object itself (Zhou, Zhang and Edelheim, 2013). Authenticity serves as a pull factor for tourism destinations, which stimulates the tourist's motivation to visit. As such, authenticity is generated by the feelings or emotions tourists may experience in relation to a place (Knudsen and Waade, 2010). Becoming aware of such emotions, the tourism industry can then better meet the needs of the market by approaching it from the perspective of the tourist experience (Zhou et al., 2013). Such an experience essentially includes the aesthetic or sensual expectations of people (Quan and Wang, 2004). Aesthetic pleasure is a natural human response and its extent differs among different individuals (Ginsborg, 2013). One source of such pleasure are the aesthetic qualities of a destination (Kirillova et al., 2014). Such qualities may contribute to the formation of the destination image and its exact functional and common peculiarities at an attribute level (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Aesthetic estimation is also part of the overall assessment of a tourist experience, and so deserves close attention from destination management (Kirillova et al., 2014).

Authenticity and aesthetics are meaningful, not only to the tourism industry, but also to tourism studies. For the past decade, such studies have been focusing on the tourist gaze, the tourism experience, authenticity and aesthetics. Many studies have contributed to the development of authentic travel. While the rise in attention to authenticity is not surprising, considering the changing cultural context of our times (Erickson, 1995), what is noteworthy is the scarcity of clear scholarly conceptualizations of authenticity and of empirical research on it (Franzese, 2009). In addition, despite the recognition of aesthetics in business research, there has been a paucity of attention on tourism aesthetics (Kirillova et al., 2014). Authenticity and aesthetics hold valuable meaning in the arena of personal dimensions, within the context of tourism. Therefore, we need to consider what it is that tourists seek from a genuine tourism experience. Specifically, this chapter will explore the dimensions of authenticity and aesthetics, and the relationship between them, with regard to the tourism experience.

## What is a real tourism experience?

Researchers have highlighted the fact that tourists seek a genuine experience from their tourist destination. This can be understood as something that adds value to the tourist experience (Park and Choi, 2011). Such an experience is a critical concept in marketing and management; therefore, scholars have paid increasing attention to this area, exerting effort in both conceptual deliberations and empirical validations (Kirillova et al., 2014). Specifically, the tourism experience refers to the information, knowledge, feelings and emotions of tourists, and their participation in various cultural and personal interactional phenomena during their stay. As such, tourist experiences have a social perspective that focuses on the relationship between the tourism subject and object, and a psychological perspective that concentrates on the emotional state of the experience (Byun, 2012). Thus, the tourism experience includes not only social, psychological and environmental factors, but also multi-dimensional meanings relating to various activities. In this sense, the experience can be understood as a process involving an understanding of tourists' motivations and a realization of their needs. A genuine tourist experience will both affect and transform the person (Knudsen and Waade, 2010).

Traditionally, tourism experiences are described as novel, unique and authentic ones, quite unlike those of everyday life (Cohen, 1972; MacCannell, 1973; Park, Choi and Lee, 2019; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999, 2000). MacCannell (1973) suggested that as people may lack authenticity in their daily lives, they attempt to experience it through tourism. In this sense, the authentic tourist experience is separate from their daily lifestyle and can thus be understood within the context of an aesthetic experience. The aesthetics of tourism are unique in the sense that the tourist experiences full immersion within a space or place that is distinct from their everyday living environment (Volo, 2009). The point at which a tourist feels a sense of time and space disconnect is the beginning of the aesthetic experience, which can lead to a type of other-worldly experience (Byun, 2015a). This key element is then translated into a sense of authenticity; such another-worldly experience is not limited to the nature of the object itself but includes a human's subjective and aesthetic appraisal. The aura of authenticity may be affected by the aesthetic qualities of tourist attractions or destinations; aesthetic pleasure seems to play an important role in the assessment of the overall experience (Liu and Jang, 2009). Tourists expect and actively seek out authentic and aesthetic experiences, and when their desires are satisfied positive word-of-mouth and revisiting intentions are formed.

As mentioned in Vannini and Williams' book (2009), in relation to the concept of authenticity, there is a strong emphasis on the formation of a collective memory if something is reproduced for the purpose of aesthetic