

Into the wild: nature as tourism experience

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Rationale

Tourism and nature have long maintained an intricate and ambivalent relationship. As nature becomes increasingly central to tourism offerings worldwide, critical questions remain about how natural environments are consumed, commodified, imagined, and ultimately impacted by tourist practice. From remote wilderness areas and national parks to rural landscapes, coastal ecosystems, and urban green spaces, encounters with nature generate meanings, emotions, and forms of engagement that connect to broader societal concerns: sustainability, well-being, identity, and pro-environmental behaviour.

Nature is not merely a passive backdrop for tourism activities; it is an active, dynamic, and often fragile element in the co-creation of experiences. Tourists bring to natural settings a wide range of expectations, representations, and cultural frameworks shaped by media, education, and prior experiences. However, these encounters reveal tensions between the desire to connect with 'the wild' and mass consumption dynamics that render such connection possible but also potentially destructive.

The accelerating pace of environmental change - including biodiversity loss, climate disruption, and the degradation of ecosystems - makes the relationship between tourism and nature ever more urgent as a field of scholarly inquiry. At the same time, nature-based tourism is increasingly mobilised as a vector for conservation funding, rural development, community empowerment, and visitor behaviour change. Understanding how tourism can contribute constructively to environmental stewardship, while confronting its contradictions, is one of the defining challenges of our times.

This track invites contributions that critically examine how nature is framed, experienced, and valued within contemporary tourism consumption. Moving beyond a simplistic dichotomy between protection and exploitation, it seeks to explore how tourism practices shape, mediate, and commodify natural environments, and how these practices in turn impact visitors' perceptions, identities, and behaviours toward nature.

The track also highlights nature as both a central and fragile tourism resource requiring careful strategic management. Particular attention is given to ways in which sustainability strategies can effectively balance environmental preservation with tourism development objectives. Contributions addressing governance frameworks, destination management models, and inclusive access policies are strongly encouraged. The track further welcomes research exploring the psychological, cultural, and behavioural dimensions of human-nature interactions in tourism contexts, including the role of reconnection, restoration, solitude, silence and awe in shaping transformative visitor experiences.

Methodologically, the track welcomes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Contributions may draw on disciplines including tourism studies, consumer behaviour, environmental psychology, cultural geography, sociology, ecology, anthropology, and planning. Comparative and longitudinal studies are particularly welcome, as are contributions that engage with underrepresented geographies and communities in tourism and nature research.

Expanded Themes and Topics

- The commodification and marketisation of natural spaces and wilderness
- Visitor experiences, emotions, and multisensory engagement with nature
- Transformative and restorative dimensions of nature-based tourism experiences
- Nature, wellness, and therapeutic landscapes: health tourism in natural settings
- Eco-anxiety and the emotional dimensions of environmental degradation for tourists
- Awe and wonder: aesthetic and spiritual responses to natural environments
- Impacts of tourism consumption on ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural heritage
- Sustainable tourism practices, certifications, and standards in natural settings
- Carbon footprint, climate change, and low-impact nature-based tourism models
- The role of digital technology, social media, and virtual reality in mediating nature experiences
- Overtourism, carrying capacity, and visitor management in natural and protected destinations
- Governance, policy, and collaborative management of natural resources for tourism
- Social inequalities, justice, and differential access to nature in tourism consumption
- Indigenous and local community perspectives on nature, land, and tourism development
- Urban nature, green infrastructure, and the rise of urban ecotourism
- Dark green tourism, rewilding tourism, and conservation-led destination development
- The role of nature-based tourism in shaping pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour change
- Representations of nature in tourism marketing, destination branding, and promotional discourse
- Children, families, and education in nature: learning through outdoor and adventure tourism
- Slow travel, minimalism, and counter-cultural movements within nature-based tourism