

# Playing Tourism: Phygital Experiences, Video Games, and the Reconfiguration of Tourist Realities

## Track Chair

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Phygital tourism has become an important lens for examining how today's travellers move across spaces that combine physical and digital elements. The growing overlap between tourism and immersive media, particularly video games, has led to experiences in which digital and real-world environments are closely interconnected.

Empirical studies show that phygital technologies, especially augmented and virtual reality, have a clear impact on how tourists perceive and experience destinations. These tools enhance engagement and a sense of presence, while also influencing how visitors process information and make decisions. In heritage settings, they can strengthen perceptions of authenticity, improve overall experience quality, and affect subsequent behaviours.

Recent empirical work demonstrates that phygital tools, particularly AR and VR, significantly influence tourist perceptions, emotions, and behaviours. Studies show that AR and VR enhance engagement, presence, and information processing, affecting decision-making and meaning-making within tourism environments. In heritage contexts, phygital experiences strengthen authenticity, improve experience quality, and shape downstream behaviours.

Latest findings demonstrate that phygitality is not a technological novelty but a measurable driver of tourist experience quality and behavioural outcomes. The broader tourism ecosystem is also undergoing structural transformation through smart destinations, metaverse environments, and human-centred design approaches. Smart tourism destinations now routinely blend physical and digital touchpoints, creating hybrid visitor pathways and new forms of co-creation.

We invite contributions that critically explore the emergence, design, and implications of phygital tourism experiences across diverse contexts. The Special Track particularly welcomes interdisciplinary perspectives bridging tourism studies, geography, media and cultural studies, marketing, and digital innovation. The Special Track aims to provide scholars with a platform to examine these transformations, compare sectoral applications, and discuss ethical, design, and strategic implications. Collectively, the current evidence base makes clear that phygital experiences represent a pivotal frontier in tourism research and practice.

## Expanded Themes and Sub-Themes

### Video Games and Phygital Tourism

- Video game-induced tourism and destination visitation
- Translation of virtual worlds into physical travel experiences
- Game studios, platforms, and tourism ecosystems

### Play, Gamification, and Hybrid Tourist Practices

- Location-based games and augmented tourism experiences
- Gamified mobility and playful engagement with destinations
- The role of interactivity, challenge, and narrative in experience design

### Phygital Assemblages and Tourist Space

- Reconfiguring tourist space as hybrid, relational, and mediated
- Interactions between embodied presence and virtual immersion
- Spatial, temporal, and affective dimensions of hybrid experiences

### Media, Storytelling, and Destination Imaginaries

- Transmedia tourism and storytelling across platforms
- Fandom, communities, and co-creation of place meanings
- The role of digital media in shaping authenticity and heritage narratives

### Behavioural and Experiential Transformations

- "Always-on" tourists and smartphone-mediated experiences
- Emotional, cognitive, and social engagement in phygital environments
- Blurring boundaries between everyday life and tourism

### Sustainability and Governance in Phygital Tourism

- Virtual and hybrid experiences as tools to manage overtourism
- Ethical and environmental implications of digital mediation
- Destination strategies in hybrid and platform-based ecosystems