



# THE CORE OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Yaniv Poria

Richard Butler

David Airey

University of Surrey, UK

**Abstract:** The paper challenges the idea that heritage tourism is simply represented by tourists at heritage attractions and suggests rather that perceptions more properly lie at its core. Relationships among four groups of variables (personal characteristics, site attributes, awareness, perceptions) and behavior (before, during, and after) are investigated. The results indicate that the perception of a place as part of personal heritage is associated with the visitation patterns. In particular those who view a place as bound up with their own heritage are likely to behave significantly differently from others. Understanding this is useful for the study of tourists' behavior and for the management of sites. **Keywords:** heritage, heritage site, heritage tourism, perception, behavior. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** L'article conteste l'idée que le tourisme patrimonial soit représenté simplement par les touristes aux sites patrimoniaux et suggère que les perceptions proviennent plutôt de son cœur. One examine les relations entre quatre groupes de variables (caractéristiques personnelles, attributs du site, conscience, perceptions) et de comportements (avant, pendant et après). Les résultats indiquent que la perception d'un endroit comme partie de l'héritage personnel est associée aux schémas des visites. En particulier, ceux qui considèrent que l'endroit est lié à leur propre héritage ont tendance à se comporter bien différemment des autres. Il serait utile de comprendre cela afin de mieux étudier le comportement des touristes et de bien gérer les sites. **Mots-clés:** patrimoine, site patrimonial, tourisme patrimonial, perception, comportement. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the links between tourists and the heritage presented at destinations, in order to understand better what is termed heritage tourism. The research draws upon a bigger study, which investigated a number of locations. This paper deals with one of these, with the specific purpose of investigating whether the relationship between the tourists and their perceptions is linked to their visitation patterns. It argues that the understanding and management of heritage tourism as a social phenomenon should not be based solely on an arbitrary factor: the presence of tourists. It is suggested that elements more sub-

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Yaniv Poria is at the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management, Ben Gurion University of the Negev and Dick Butler and David Airey are professors in the School of Management at the University of Surrey (Guildford GU2 7XH, UK. Email <[yporia@bgu-mail.bgu.ac.il](mailto:yporia@bgu-mail.bgu.ac.il)>) Poria's research interests are the relationships among tourist characteristics, site attributes, tourism perceptions, and visitation patterns. Butler's areas include destination development, sustainability, and impact assessment. Airey's cover tourism education, policy, and development.

jective in nature and relating to the actual relationship between the space and the individual lie at the core of this phenomenon. The research presented challenges the perception that all those who visit a place come only to “gaze”, be educated or to enjoy themselves. For some, it is argued this is an emotional experience, that people come to “feel” rather than to “gaze” (Urry 1990).

### CLARIFYING THE CORE OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage, “the ‘buzz’ word of the 1990s” (Palmer 1999:315), is regarded as one of the most significant and fastest growing components of tourism (Alzua, O’Leary and Morrison 1998; Herbert 1995). It is referred to as something which needs to be managed (Cheung 1999) and marketed (Bennett 1995) differently. The subject is of increasing interest from a range of disciplines and its study is perceived as useful for understanding social behavior of individuals and society as a whole (Hewison 1987; Nuryanti 1996). Research has focused on the growing “heritage industry” (Conlin 2001; Hewison 1987) where researchers often differentiate between cultural (Richards 1996), natural (Hall 2000), and built (Laws 1998) elements. This paper focuses upon what is generally called cultural heritage, but for convenience the term heritage is used throughout.

The literature commonly investigates and clarifies elements associated with the supply of heritage and its management (Crang 1999; Halewood and Hannam 2001; Garrod and Fyall 2000). Less interest and attention has been paid to the demand component and even less to the relationship between the two. Of the literature about demand, much is concerned with motivation (Swarbrooke 1994) and market segments (Richards 1996). Few studies explore the relationship between these and the core of site attributes, which is believed to be essential for understanding heritage tourism as a social phenomenon. Clarification of this relationship could provide researchers with the theoretical background necessary for a more meaningful understanding.

Earlier work in this field in Ghana (Bruner 1995), and at the Irish National Heritage Park (Johnson 1999) refers to perceptions as a factor relevant in understanding behavior. Cheung (1999) indicates that a location (Ping Shan Heritage Trail) can have different meanings for different people. Fawcett and Cormack (2000) suggest that, in the context of the presentation of artifacts associated with literature (authors and/or their stories), the actual perception of something as authentic may be influenced by the understanding of what is “real” and “authentic”. Gruffudd, Herbert and Piccini (1999) believe that what is presented stimulates thought and notions based on the individual’s background. Michael (2002) asserts that heritage tourism should not be viewed in terms of arbitrary issues, but should take into consideration sociopsychological needs. Another study of relevance here concerns residents’ attitudes. Uriely, Israeli and Reichel (2002), taking into account local people’s religious affiliations, argue that the relationship between the local residents and the heritage presented can influence the locals’ attitudes towards development (in Nazareth, in the case of

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