

Editorial: Reconfiguring tourism futures – culture, technology, health and governance in a post-pandemic world

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The papers brought together in this issue of the *Journal of Tourism Futures* collectively illuminate a sector in profound transition (Bellato *et al.*, 2022; Pollock, 2012; Pollock, 2019; Pollock, 2025; Postma *et al.*, 2025; Song *et al.*, 2025; Yeoman *et al.*, 2022b). Tourism is no longer best understood through siloed lenses of demand, supply or destination management. Instead, the contributions assembled here reveal an increasingly complex ecosystem shaped by cultural motivations, technological mediation, biosecurity concerns, individual differences, governance regimes and planetary limits (Postma *et al.*, 2025). Taken together, these papers invite us to rethink tourism futures not as a return to “normal” but as an ongoing process of adaptation, negotiation and reimagination (Yeoman *et al.*, 2022a; Yeoman, 2023).

A recurring anchor across several contributions is culture, both as a driver of travel and as a site of contestation. The study by Álvarez-Díaz *et al.* (2026) of domestic cultural trips in Spain advances our understanding of who the cultural traveler is and why cultural motivations matter. By identifying socio-demographic, economic and behavioral determinants of cultural participation, the paper reminds us that cultural tourism is not a niche activity but a differentiated practice shaped by education, income, life stage and prior experience. Importantly, the focus on domestic travel challenges the persistent assumption that cultural tourism is primarily international. In an era of climate concern and disrupted mobility, this recalibration toward domestic cultural demand has significant implications for tourism resilience and regional development.

Culture also sits at the heart of the concept of glocalization, explored through residents’ perspectives in Southeastern Nigeria (Eyisi and Okonkwo, 2026). Here, tourism futures are framed not through visitor demand but through local meaning-making. The paper highlights how global tourism imaginaries interact, sometimes uneasily, with local values, traditions and power structures. Residents are not passive recipients of tourism development; they actively interpret, adapt and resist external influences. This contribution reinforces a critical future-facing insight: sustainable tourism futures depend not only on market signals or technological solutions but also on culturally embedded governance arrangements that respect local agency while engaging with global flows.

If culture and place provide one axis of tourism futures, the individual tourist provides another. Terzić *et al.*’s (2026) paper on personality traits and post-COVID travel behavior foregrounds psychological diversity as a key determinant of how tourism demand will evolve. Rather than assuming homogeneous post-pandemic travelers, the study demonstrates how traits such as

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openness, neuroticism or extraversion shape attitudes to risk, preference for crowded destinations and willingness to adopt new forms of travel. This insight complicates overly deterministic forecasts and calls for more nuanced scenario-building. Tourism futures, the paper argues implicitly, will be plural coexisting patterns of cautious, hyper-local travel alongside renewed enthusiasm for exploration.

Technology emerges as a powerful mediator across several articles but never as a neutral force. [Orea-Giner et al.'s \(2026\)](#) exploration of artificial intelligence and cultural tourist experiences, framed through the lens of Industry 5.0, signals a shift away from efficiency-driven automation toward human-centric technological integration. AI is presented not merely as a tool for personalization or operational optimization but as a means to augment cultural interpretation, accessibility and co-creation. Yet, this paper also raises questions about authenticity, data ethics and the risk of technological overreach. In future cultural tourism, the challenge will be to ensure that AI enhances rather than replaces the human and cultural dimensions of travel.

These concerns resonate strongly with the analysis of Amazon Explore and virtual tourism experiences. As [Alegro et al. \(2026\)](#) note, the entry of a global digital platform into the tourism experience economy exemplifies how boundaries between physical and virtual travel are dissolving. Virtual experiences do not simply substitute for travel; they reframe value propositions, redistribute power and reshape expectations. For some, they offer inclusion and low-carbon alternatives; for others, they risk deepening digital divides and platform dependency. As this paper makes clear, tourism futures will be increasingly hybrid, demanding new regulatory, ethical and business models that recognize the influence of digital giants on meaning, access and value creation.

Alongside culture and technology, health and sustainability form a third critical axis in this issue. [Pektaş \(2026\)](#) introduces the concept of “obese destinations”, which provides a compelling metaphor for places overburdened by excessive tourism consumption. Drawing attention to congestion, resource depletion and declining quality of life, the paper reframes overtourism not as a temporary imbalance but as a structural condition linked to growth-oriented paradigms. This perspective aligns closely with [Sacramento's \(2026\)](#) paper on mass tourism, biosecurity and sustainability, which situates COVID-19 as both a shock and a symptom. Pandemics, the authors argue, expose systemic vulnerabilities arising from hypermobility, density and ecological disruption. Tourism futures, from this viewpoint, must confront uncomfortable trade-offs between volume, safety and sustainability.

Governance responses to these challenges are explored in innovative ways across the issues. The paper by [Lehmann \(2026\)](#) on future travel visas provocatively imagines mobility rights being allocated based on desirability criteria such as health, age and cultural interest. While speculative, this contribution raises urgent ethical questions about access, discrimination and the commodification of mobility. It underscores how biosecurity logics, once exceptional, may become normalized in tourism governance. Who gets to travel in the future and on what terms emerges as a central question for both researchers and policymakers.

Similarly, governance is foregrounded in the examination of hotel star rating systems. [Koutoulas and Vagena's \(2026\)](#) paper, at first glance, star ratings may appear anachronistic in the age of platforms and peer reviews. Yet by capturing the perspectives of rating operators, the paper reveals a system in transition rather than decline. Star ratings are evolving to incorporate sustainability, technology and experiential quality, suggesting that legacy institutions can adapt to future demands. This evolution mirrors broader tensions in tourism governance between standardization and flexibility, expert authority and user-generated evaluation.

Finally, [Aschauer and Egger's \(2026\)](#) longitudinal study of tourists' perceptions following COVID-19 offers a sobering but hopeful synthesis. While attitudes toward travel, risk and sustainability have shifted, the changes are neither linear nor universal. Some pandemic-induced behaviors persist; others fade as memories recede. This finding reinforces a key message running through the issue: tourism futures are dynamic, contested and uneven. Crisis can catalyze reflection and

innovation, but structural transformation requires sustained effort, institutional change and cultural buy-in.

Together, the papers in this issue challenge simplistic narratives of recovery or disruption. They point instead toward a future tourism landscape characterized by cultural recalibration, technological hybridity, differentiated demand, intensified governance and heightened ethical stakes. For scholars, this collection underscores the value of interdisciplinary, multi-scalar and forward-looking research. For practitioners and policymakers, it offers both cautionary lessons and creative provocations.

As tourism continues to navigate uncertainty from climate change to digital disruption and global health risks, the futures we imagine and enact will matter more than ever. This issue of the *Journal of Tourism Futures* does not prescribe a single pathway forward. Rather, it invites readers to engage critically with multiple possible futures and to recognize that the shape of tourism to come will be determined as much by values and choices as by trends and technologies.

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