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# Theme editorial: The changing face of global tourism trends

The global tourism industry is no longer merely in a state of post-pandemic recovery; it is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift. As outlined in this theme issue, the central strategic question guiding this collection is: “What awaits the tourism industry in the near future: Do the global tourism trends reshape the industry?” This issue of *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* (WHATT) brings together a diverse range of research that collectively argues that the future of tourism lies at the intersection of technological integration, hyper-personalization and inclusive sustainability. From the digital footprints of nomads to the celestial narratives of the night sky, the articles presented here move beyond traditional metrics to explore the “new normal” of the travel ecosystem.

The digital transformation of tourism has evolved from a supplementary tool into a core strategic necessity. This issue underlines that artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept but a primary driver of operational efficiency and personalized guest experiences. This technological backbone facilitates the rise of new traveller archetypes, most notably the “digital nomad.” Bibliometric analysis highlights how the boundary between work and leisure has blurred, necessitating a re-evaluation of destination infrastructure and policy. Furthermore, the shift from top-down planning to bottom-up construction is evidenced by research demonstrating how digital communities and visual narratives on social media are now the primary architects of modern tourism routes, challenging traditional destination management models.

A recurring theme across this issue is the shift toward “meaningful experiences” over “material consumption.” The presented conceptual framework redefines the night sky not just as a natural resource but as a narrative terrain where stargazing meets ancient storytelling, offering a blueprint for sustainable and transformative travel. Similarly, it is illustrated that nostalgia and modern comfort can be synthesized to create high-prestige, sustainable transport experiences that stimulate regional development.

The psychological dimension of these experiences is crucial. Through thematic analysis, it is revealed that modern retreats cater to both hedonic relaxation and eudaimonic personal growth. This holistic view of the traveller is further supported by research which proves that destination loyalty is deeply rooted in a multi-sensory engagement – where sight, sound, smell and taste converge to create lasting memories.

As this issue redefines tourism, the industry’s commitment to social responsibility and inclusivity must remain steadfast. The investigation addresses a critical safety gap, emphasizing that true accessibility includes the protection of vulnerable groups during emergencies. Moreover, this issue underscores the power of gastronomy as a tool for cultural representation and social integration, proving that the “smell of home” can become a powerful asset for urban tourism and social cohesion. The synthesis of these diverse studies leads us to the conclusions drawn in the final article. The “future of tourism” is not a singular destination but a continuous process of adaptation. The findings suggest that the industry must embrace a “socio-technical” approach – where advanced technology serves human-centric, sustainable and inclusive goals.

By addressing global trends such as AI, wellness and niche experiential markets, this theme issue provides a roadmap for practitioners and academics alike. As an answer to the strategic question, it becomes clear that the redefinition of tourism is an invitation to innovate, to include and to inspire a new generation of travellers in an ever-changing world.

The insights gathered in this theme issue offer a dual-track roadmap for stakeholders. For policy makers, the evidence underscores a transition from traditional infrastructure



management to the governance of “smart and inclusive ecosystems.” This involves creating regulatory frameworks that support digital nomadism, ensuring that accessibility – particularly in disaster management – is integrated into national tourism standards and protecting “dark skies” as vital cultural and natural assets. For practitioners, the implications are even more immediate: the shift toward sensory-driven and AI-supported personalization requires a move away from standardized service models. Industry leaders should leverage social media not just for marketing, but as a “bottom-up” tool for co-creating gastronomy and experience routes with travellers. By adopting the “Socio-Technical” approach proposed in our conclusion, stakeholders can ensure that technological investments directly enhance human well-being and social cohesion, ultimately securing a resilient and competitive position in the global tourism landscape.

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