

## Categorization of Heritage Tourism: A Conceptual Overview.

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Cite this paper as B. Pandeewari, Dr. R. Abbas (2025) Categorization of Heritage Tourism: A Conceptual Overview. Journal of Neonatal Surgery, 14, (33s) 727-731

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism has existed for centuries, but it gained unprecedented popularity in the twentieth century due to globalization, improved transportation, and rising disposable incomes. People travel for religious, health, leisure, learning, or cultural exploration. Pilgrimage and medical tourism represent travel for spiritual or health purposes, whereas heritage tourism emphasizes visiting sites of historical, cultural, and traditional significance. These travels not only generate revenue but also influence the social, economic, and cultural fabric of host communities. Heritage tourism specifically focuses on places and practices that authentically represent a community's past and present. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, heritage tourism involves "traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, including cultural, historical, and natural resources." This paper explores the meaning, classifications, and significance of heritage tourism, highlighting its economic, social, and cultural implications.

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**Keywords:** Heritage, Tourism, Classification, Cultural Resources, Socio-Economic Impact

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### INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism has emerged as a major field within cultural and travel studies, linking historical memory, identity formation, and place-based experience with contemporary mobility and economic activity. It refers to travel motivated by an interest in the material and non-material remains of the past, including monuments, landscapes, traditions, artistic expressions, and community practices. Unlike general leisure travel, heritage tourism is shaped by interpretation, preservation frameworks, and narrative construction around selected pasts socially framed selection of cultural elements that societies choose to preserve, display, and transmit. Tourism connected with heritage therefore operates through classification systems that organise sites, practices, and experiences into identifiable categories. Such categorization supports policy design, conservation priorities, visitor management, and interpretive strategies. It also assists researchers in distinguishing between different motivations, resource types, and modes of engagement. Conceptual categorization of heritage tourism generally rests on multiple axes: tangible versus intangible heritage; natural versus cultural heritage; monumental versus living heritage; and local versus transnational heritage expressions. Each category reflects differences in resource form, stakeholder involvement, regulatory control, and visitor experience. For example, built heritage sites such as temples, forts, and historic cities demand conservation architecture and site regulation, while intangible heritage such as festivals, crafts, and ritual performances depends on community continuity and cultural transmission. A structured overview of heritage tourism categories enables clearer analytical comparison across regions and time periods. It also clarifies the relationship between heritage interpretation, authenticity claims, commercialization, and community participation. The following conceptual framework presents the major categories commonly used in heritage tourism studies and outlines their defining features, scope, and research relevance

### Significance of Heritage Tourism

1. **Economic Contribution:** Heritage tourism generates revenue through entry fees, local crafts, hospitality services, and employment in tour guiding and site maintenance. For example, UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India contribute approximately ₹2,000 crore annually to local economies.
2. **Cultural Preservation:** Active tourism encourages restoration and maintenance of monuments, historical buildings, and traditional practices.

3. **Social Awareness:** Visitors gain insights into local traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles, fostering intercultural understanding.
4. **Environmental Protection:** Many heritage sites include protected natural landscapes, motivating conservation efforts.<sup>3</sup>

## HERITAGE TOURISM AND ITS CLASSIFICATIONS

Tourism is an experience that people are attracted towards. It is a never satiating one that always goads people to continue or have it often. This results in the fact that it has a great impact on the behaviour of people and, efforts taken to develop tourism, national governments, tourism businesses and society. Tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest growing one in the world. There is always scope and engagement in tourism activity. The trend in this happy-go-lucky-occasion is expected to bear fruit in future as more and more number of countries resort to tourism development. This helps countries in earning more foreign exchange, creating more employment and accelerating the growth in their economies.

Tourism is one of the gifts that the twentieth century popularized despite the fact that there had been tourism activity before that. When people across the world travel in large numbers for religious and health reasons, the activity is termed as pilgrimage and medical tourism. The year 1950 witnessed that there had been a rapid increase in the demand across the western world for people to travel internationally and visit a variety of different destinations. When people travel in the name of tourism, it results in the generating of funds and changing economic, social conditions in many countries across the world. This expanding variety of the physical and cultural characteristics of the receiving destinations awaits tourists in other countries. This paper focuses on various classifications and meaning of Heritage tourism in detail.

## HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism refers to tourists visiting places of traditional, historical and cultural significance with the aim of learning, paying respect to recreational purposes. According to The National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources." Heritage tourism is a field of tourism that is concerned with the cultural heritage of the location where tourism is happening.<sup>4</sup>

### Heritage Classification

Heritage sites broadly covering two vital segments (i) Cultural Heritage (ii) Natural Heritage. In general, it encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences.<sup>5</sup>

#### Natural Heritage:

Natural heritage is not the creation of human beings. But they are naturally existent as gifts of nature. Natural Heritage presents a Kaleidoscope of geographical and environmental features. They include natural features such as high and lofty mountains and hills, from mighty to small rivers, rivulets and streams, dense forests, deserts and a long coastline.

#### Cultural Heritage:

Cultural heritage is what has been evolved over centuries through imagination, creation, intelligence, skills, and artistic abilities of the people. It is the cumulative result of different practices of both religious and social aspects. This is very well represented in customs, ceremonies, rites and rituals, dance, drama, music, food-habits living life styles and everything connected with the day to day life of society, community or the nation.

#### World Heritage Sites:

To quote, UNESCO, the World Heritage Site is a place, such as a forest, mountain, lake, island, desert, monument, building, complex, or city which is listed by the UNESCO as of special cultural or physical significance. The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. As of 2018, 1092 sites are listed. Out of which 845 cultural, 209 natural, and 38 mixed properties, in 160 states parties. India has now 37 World Heritage Sites. While each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located, UNESCO considers it is the interest of the international community to preserve each site.<sup>6</sup>

#### Cultural and Natural Heritage - Criteria by UNESCO

The World Heritage Committee, the main body is in charge of the implementation of the Convention, has developed precise criteria for the inscription of properties on the World Heritage List. These are all included in a document entitled "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention". The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties are also important considerations. Since 1992 significant interactions between people and the natural environment have been recognized as cultural landscapes. Until the end of 2004, World Heritage sites were selected on the basis of six cultural and four natural criteria. With the adoption of the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation

of the World Heritage Convention, only one set of ten criteria exists.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Cultural criteria:**

- i) Represents a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- ii) Exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time, or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design.
- iii) Bears a unique or exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living, or which has disappeared.
- iv) It's a unique example of a type of building, architectural, or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.
- v) Is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- vi) Is directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

#### **Natural Criteria**

- Contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- It's an outstanding example representing major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.
- It's an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals.
- Contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

#### **HERITAGE SUB - SECTIONS:**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its World Heritage Convention, in 1972 have classified heritages as cultural and natural as explained in the following sub-sections.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Cultural Heritage:**

Tangible and intangible are the two sub-categories that the cultural heritage is distinguished into.

#### **Tangible Cultural Heritage**

Tangible cultural heritage is further classified into 'tangible cultural immovable' and 'tangible cultural movable'. Tangible cultural immovable composes of

- i. monuments pertaining to archaeological sites and industrial archaeology,
- ii. buildings with architectural works of historical centres and groups of buildings that are also combined termed in most texts as 'built heritage' and
- iii. sites such as cultural and landscapes, historical parks, gardens and botanical gardens. Tangible cultural movables encompass.
- iv. archives,
- v. museum collections and
- vi. libraries.

These heritages are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of aesthetic, anthropological, ethnological perspectives, art, history or science.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage is recognised into music, dance, literature, theatre, oral traditions, traditional performances, social practices, know-how, crafts, cultural spaces and religious ceremonies that are either artefacts, cultural spaces, expressions, instruments, knowledge, objects, practices, representations or skills that provide a sense of identity and continuity to the communities, groups or individuals concerned.<sup>10</sup> Thus, intangible heritage is mostly abstract (without any physical form). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation defined intangible category as heritage, "embracing all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, i.e., collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition.

These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture and are modified over a period of time through a process of collective recreation".<sup>11</sup>

### Cultural Heritage Typologies

The above-shown sub-sections show the various categories of heritages. The first one (tangible, immovable, and cultural category) elaborates on and comprises of common assets (of mankind) with distinct identity and unique character that can be differentiated into various types depending upon their significance or utility as under.<sup>12</sup>

- \* **Residential heritage:** Bungalows, Forts, Havelis, Palaces, Shikargarhs, Town Houses
- \* **Commercial heritage:** Bazaars, Factories, Garages, Seaports, Shops, Warehouses etc.
- \* **Community heritage:** Airports, Colleges, Courts, Hospitals, Libraries, Police stations, Post offices, Railway Stations, Schools, etc.
- \* **Religious heritage:** Churches, Dargahs, Gurudwaras, Mosques, Shrines, Temples,
- \* **Memorial's heritage:** Chatris, Headstones, Historic inscriptions, Samadhis, Tombs, etc.<sup>13</sup>
- \* **Heritage precinct:** Historical and traditional places such as heritage villages; craft centres; urban precincts and streetscapes; historic and trade routes; academic, scientific, technological and industrial establishments and transportation sites, etc.<sup>14</sup>
- \* **Heritage landscapes:** Landscapes (gardens, open areas, parks, etc.); scenic sites (hills, hillocks, sacred grooves, valleys, wooded areas, etc.) and water bodies (rivers, streams, reservoirs, tank, wells) etc.

### Natural Heritage

All-natural heritages are treated as tangible and immovable based on several themes such as a) natural and maritime parks of ecological interest b) geological and physical formations, c) landscapes of outstanding natural beauty and d) allied natural themes.<sup>15</sup>

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the nodal agency for forwarding any request for World Heritage status to any Indian site whether cultural or natural. Based on the proposals received from the Central or State Government agencies as well as management Trusts, etc., and after their due scrutiny, the Government forwards the nomination dossiers to the World Heritage Center.<sup>16</sup> Some of these marvelous old cultural monuments of universal acclaim are listed among World Heritages by UNESCO.

### Emerging Insights in Heritage Tourism

1. **Community Participation:** Local communities actively participating in tourism management ensure sustainable preservation<sup>17</sup>.
2. **Sustainability Practices:** Balancing visitor numbers, waste management, and environmental protection prevents degradation.<sup>18</sup>
3. **Technology Integration:** Digital documentation, virtual tours, and AR/VR enhance visitor engagement and accessibility.<sup>19</sup>
4. **Educational Value:** Heritage tourism promotes historical literacy and intercultural understanding.<sup>20</sup>
5. **Economic Multiplier Effect:** Heritage tourism stimulates local economies via hospitality, handicrafts, transport, and services.<sup>21</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Heritage tourism serves as a crucial bridge between the past and present, fostering cultural, social, and environmental awareness while providing economic benefits. By understanding the classifications, typologies, and management practices, policymakers, scholars, and tourism professionals can ensure **sustainable and authentic heritage tourism**. Proper integration of community participation, technology, and preservation strategies enhances the long-term viability of heritage sites

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