

## **Heritage Tourism and COVID-19: Why we should NOT back to normal?**

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### **Abstract**

Since the beginning of 2020, an unprecedented crisis has influenced the economic, political, social and cultural realities of the world we live in. The widespread distribution of what is known as SARS-CoV-2 but commonly referred as COVID-19, has had a crucial impact on various pillars of economy and society. Travel bans, mobility restrictions, self-isolation and quarantines have become the 'new normal' across the globe. At times when most countries have put certain mobility restrictions in place such as border closures and temporary ban on international travel, tourism has been one of the hardest hit industries. Although economic, political and social crises have previously affected tourism, the scale and magnitude of COVID-19 has shaken the international tourism industry with unprecedented consequences. Despite the notable negative impacts, COVID-19 has also brought us an unexpected opportunity to re-consider and re-evaluate the development of tourism at a global level. In the past few decades, tourism has brought many opportunities for economic and societal development but at the same time, has also contributed negatively to community life, well-being and natural environment. Overtourism has become a reality causing a number of serious concerns and issues around development, exploitation and sustainability of tourist resources.

Heritage tourism is often cited as one of the prime examples of overtourism and associated with socio-cultural tensions and issues. The tourist gaze at historic cities and places has risen exponentially, transforming historic cities into mass tourism destinations. Moreover, heritage tourism has been more focused on consumption and visits to heritage sites en masse, instead of focusing on exploration and learning about local culture and heritage. Due to COVID-19, however, overtourism has been replaced by no tourism at all which brings us the opportunity to reflect on the nature of heritage tourism, its associated products, heritage experiences and the heritage tourists.

This conceptual paper discusses the future of heritage tourism in the post-pandemic era and argues that we need a new approach to tourism at historic cities. The nature of heritage tourism and the focus of tourist activities need to change and the 'new normal' should focus more on preserving the balance between preservation of historic resources and their development as tourism products.

**Key words:** heritage; culture; tourism; COVID-19; new normal;

## **Short Bio**

Dr Nick Naumov is a Senior Lecturer in Hospitality & Tourism Management at the Department of Events, Tourism & Hospitality at University of Northampton, UK. Nick's research interests include cultural and historical geographies of Eastern Europe, critical heritage studies, heritage tourism, intangible heritage, gastronomic tourism and religious tourism. Nick is mainly interested in qualitative research, more specifically ethnographic and anthropological approaches such as ethnography, participant observation and interviews/informal conversations. Nick is an external expert for European Institute of Cultural Routes and visiting faculty member at European Hotel School (Paris, France), Munich University of Applied Sciences and Deggendorf Institute of Technology (Germany), Meikai University (Japan) and Amity University (India).