The impact of cultural tourism on the arts

**Cultural tourism adds £3.2 billion a year to London economy**
*Georgia Snow, The Stage newspaper, [UK], 3/25/15*

Cultural tourism contributes £3.2 billion a year to London’s economy, [according to a new] report by the Greater London Authority. It also found that 80,000 jobs are supported by cultural tourism in the capital. 24% of international tourists visiting London attend the theatre. Of those visiting other parts of the UK, 18% attend theatre. The GLA’s report is published alongside a new vision for cultural tourism in London, which has been unveiled by the Mayor, Boris Johnson. “If we are to remain a world capital of culture, we must stay ahead of the game. That means bringing the tourism and culture worlds closer together to make sure visitors are able to enjoy the fantastic range of cultural activities right across our great city,” he said. Johnson outlined a series of objectives as part of the vision, which include increased collaboration between the cultural and tourism sectors. This will come in the form of a new steering group made up of leading figures from both sectors and workshops for cultural professionals and the tourism industry to exchange ideas and practices. An action plan for the future also includes publishing a white paper on the value of cultural tourism to London as well as commissioning new mayor-led tourism research.

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**Mass tourism forces mobbed museums to rethink welcome**
*Antoine Froidefond, Agence France Presse, 3/20/15*

Mass tourism, spurred by cheap flights and richer emerging economies, is forcing the world’s top museums to rethink their welcome, notably by boosting access, embracing apps and improving ancillary services such as eateries and gift shops. The overhaul is dictated by the sheer numbers of visitors crowding galleries. “The Louvre was conceived for 5 million people,” noted museum president Jean-Luc Martinez. “For the past three years straight we’ve had more than 9 million.” With globalization, there are not only more and more people trying to squeeze through the doors of the world’s museums, but they hail from many more cultures and countries than in the past. Museums are finding that they no longer cater to a public well-versed in the history and artistic movements on show, but to visitors needing more context and information to process what they are seeing. “We are still far from learning the lessons from this diversification,” said Alain Seban, who has run the Pompidou Center in Paris for the past eight years. Foreigners make up 70% of the Louvre’s visitors and 80% of Versaille’s, with Chinese in particular a growing contingent. “This imposes another way to receive them and to try to understand what they have come to see,” the president of the Palace of Versailles, Catherine Pegard said. “You have to start from the idea that these people know nothing,” Martinez explained. References that might seem obvious need explaining, with multiple translations. Several museums are ramping
up their digital offerings to support their collections, giving visitors the opportunity to load information into their smartphones or tablets before walking the halls. The Internet is also sustaining a virtual model of the museums that is just as popular as the real thing. The Met’s website last year received more than 26 million visits, while the National Gallery had 6 million. “It’s paradoxical to present the amount of visitors as a problem,” Martinez said. “A museum’s mission, after all, is to allow the widest public possible the chance to see its collections.”

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It’s now easier for mainland Chinese to visit the United States, thanks to relaxed visa rules instituted late last year, allowing 10 years before visa renewal rather than one year. The change is expected to increase Chinese tourism and real estate investment, but it will also have a less obvious beneficiary: American museums. According to the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board, China was the city’s biggest driver of overseas visits in 2014, with an increase of more than 20 percent over the previous year; it was the third straight year China was the top source of overseas tourists. More than 740,000 Chinese visited New York last year, almost five times as many as in 2009. These tourists spend, on average, $7,200 per visit per person, including travel and lodging, according to the U.S. Travel Association. While a big part of the money goes toward shopping — indulged in by 85% of Chinese tourists — art museums and galleries are also high on many visitors’ lists, with 36% choosing them in 2013, according to the association. Museums of all sizes and types across the United States are trying to cater to the Chinese. The efforts include audio tours and maps in Mandarin; acceptance of UnionPay, a Chinese credit card; and promotion on Weibo, a Chinese social media platform. As varied as it is now, American museums’ outreach to the mainland Chinese is likely to grow far more diverse in the future: The US Department of Commerce projects that visits by Chinese will increase an average of 18% annually through 2019, reaching 4.9 million and making China America’s largest overseas visitor market.

In Australia, small towns are building big business with cultural tourism
Sarah Ward, ArtsHub [Australia], 2/27/15
For those who rarely venture past the outskirts of a major city, it is easy to forget that culture doesn’t only dwell in places with bright lights and tall buildings. Creative endeavours are both essential and active in regional areas, not only serving locals, but visitors as well. Indeed, it is the latter that helps the arts to flourish in small towns and surrounding districts. Around Australia, cultural tourism — or the consumption of culture by those who have journeyed more than 40 kilometres to attend an event — is big business.
“...Cultural tourism is essentially commoditised culture,” explains Stephen Clark, Chief Executive Officer of Flying Arts Alliance, an arts and cultural development organisation that has been delivering visual arts projects and services to regional and remote Queensland for more than four decades. “It is culture packaged, distributed, promoted and priced-up for consumption for culturally motivated visitors,” he continues. “It is packaging and selling culture, as simple as that.” But how does cultural tourism work, and what are the broader impacts for communities?

The first step in enticing travellers to a specific place to attend an event is understanding them, notes Clark. “It’s a fundamental marketing principle: know where your customers are, know what they like to do, know what they consume, understand the type of experiences they are looking for, and –particularly in regards to cultural tourism – what is motivating them.” That’s only part of the process, however, with Clark advocating using this knowledge to inform further development. “Cultural tourists are driven to find novelty, to find educative experiences, to find experiences that contribute to their personal development and growth,” he explains. “If you can identify those, you can design your products and services accordingly.” This includes all aspects of their visit – “think about the whole experience you are offering,” he encourages, such as the things beyond just buying a ticket and showing up. Clark calls this “the augmented product,” and notes that it is the little things and additional bits that can prove most influential. It is important to remember that “it is not the work they are purchasing – they are purchasing the experience.”