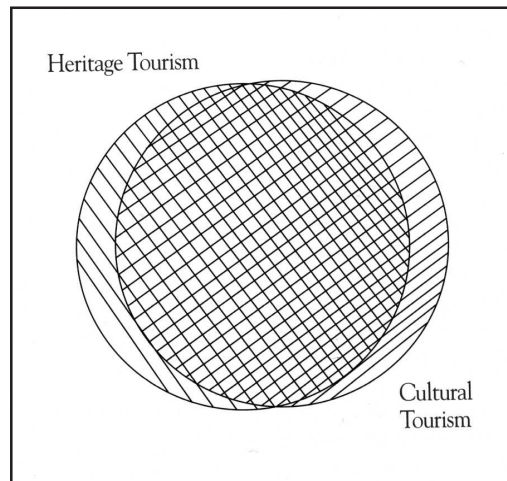


Cultural and Heritage Tourism—The Same, or Different?



Working with new and diverse partners has generated a lot of discussion about the overlap and differences between cultural tourism and heritage tourism. Are they one and the same? Is one a part of the other? How do we decide which term to use? To answer those questions, we looked at cultural and heritage tourism programs across America to see where they were based, who was behind them, what they included, and how they were funded.

It is not possible to define cultural tourism and heritage tourism as two entirely different kinds of tourism. In looking at definitions of both heritage and cultural tourism, there clearly is overlap between the two. Without question, the areas of overlap far exceed the differences. Most importantly, the heritage visitor and the cultural visitor are quite often one and the same, and thus it makes sense to work together to create appealing and well-rounded cultural heritage visitor experiences.

An informal survey of programs across the country reveals that “heritage” programs are more often found in rural areas while “cultural” programs are more often found in urban settings. Historic preservation groups are more likely to describe “heritage tourism” programs, while museum and arts groups are more likely to refer to “cultural tourism” programs, though the content is often quite similar. Heritage tourism programs are often associated with history and the past, and yet, modern culture often has roots in the past. Furthermore, an enlightened preservationist is able to see the culture of today as the heritage of tomorrow.

The primary difference between the two is that heritage tourism is “place” based. Heritage tourism programs create a sense of place rooted in the local landscape, architecture, people,

artifacts, traditions and stories that make a particular place unique. Cultural tourism programs celebrate the same kinds of experiences, though with less emphasis on place. Thus viewing the work of a great master artist in his home and studio is a heritage tourism experience, while viewing those very same pieces of art in a traveling exhibition is a cultural tourism experience. The *content* is the same while the *context* is different.

This distinction clarifies why preservationists refer to “heritage tourism” while museums and arts organizations are more likely to use the term “cultural tourism.” Historic preservation tends to address the built environment and the cultural landscape, and preservationists place a high value on maintaining the original context. On the other hand, museums and the arts are more likely to work with collections and performances that can be transported and shared with other communities. As large metropolitan areas have the ability to finance such visiting collections and performances, it is not surprising that the term “cultural tourism” is more often used in urban areas.

While using the term “cultural heritage tourism” is useful to help bring together all of the partners that need to be working together on this type of an effort (including organizations and individuals representing the arts, museums, the humanities, historic preservation, heritage areas, ethnic groups and others including tourism partners), it is cumbersome to use in marketing programs to potential visitors. An informal survey reveals that the terms “cultural” and “heritage” have different meaning for the lay person—and for your potential visitors. Thus based on your audience, it may be more effective to use one term or the other depending upon the image that you are trying to convey.

You may want to try this for yourself. Find a group of individuals who are not connected to any kind of heritage or cultural organization, and ask them to write down a list of words that they associate with the terms “culture” or “heritage.” While those of us working within the cultural world know that there are many kinds of culture, the average person tends to equate “cultural” with more of an upscale, urban experience. “Heritage,” on the other hand, tends to be associated with history and more of a grassroots experience. If we understand the associations that each word offers, we can use those associations to our advantage in our marketing efforts.

Another factor to consider is the sources of technical and financial support that are available for your cultural heritage tourism efforts. In some places, it is easier to secure support for *cultural* efforts and activities, while in other places, *heritage* effort and activities are given funding preference.

In the end, whether you call your experience a “heritage” or a “cultural” tourism experience, the measure of success is not in the name. Success is measured by the number of people that you attract, by the quality of the experience that you offer, and by the economic impact that you generate for your community.

