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## Nostalgia and tourism

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### ABSTRACT

For most of the past 300 years, the concept of nostalgia has been regarded as a medical condition. However, since the 1980s, it has become heavily associated with the 'heritage industry' and the creation of consumer experiences, especially in a tourism and leisure context. This special issue on nostalgia and tourism aims to encourage and advance the scholarly conversation about the relationship between nostalgia and contemporary heritage tourism. The collection of articles in this special issue provides theoretical, conceptual and empirical research on nostalgia and heritage tourism in different contexts. Hence, this editorial addresses the historical development of the term 'nostalgia' and examines the key themes in research on nostalgia and heritage tourism.

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Homesickness; migration; personal heritage; restorative nostalgia; reflective nostalgia

## Introduction

Nostalgia is a concept that has long been integral to tourism and heritage. However, like both tourism and heritage, our understandings of what constitutes nostalgia and how it affects tourist motivations and the desire to conserve and protect heritage have changed over time. Significantly, the concept of nostalgia has always had a close connection to travel and tourism.

The concept of nostalgia was first introduced in 1699 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) to refer in medical terms to the adverse psychological and physiological symptoms shown by Swiss mercenaries who travelled overseas for business. Hofer (1688/1934) conceptualized nostalgia as a medical or neurological disease. He termed nostalgia 'a cerebral disease' (1688/1934, p. 387) caused by 'the quite continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling' (Hofer, 1688/1934, p. 384). In discussing travelling mercenaries, another physician, Scheuchzer, proposed that nostalgia was caused by 'a sharp differential in atmospheric pressure causing excessive body pressurization, which in turn drove blood from the heart to the brain, thereby producing the observed affliction of sentiment' (1735; cited in Davis, 1979, p. 2).

In the nineteenth century, nostalgia came to be understood as a form of melancholia or depression, as opposed to a neurological disease (McCann, 1941; Rosen, 1975). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nostalgia remained to be conceptualized as a form of psychological disorder

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and was referred to as a ‘mentally repressive compulsive disorder’ (Fodor, 1950, p. 25), and ‘a regressive manifestation closely related to the issue of loss, grief, incomplete mourning, and, finally, depression’ (Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 1980, p. 110). However, in the late twentieth century, the common conceptualization of nostalgia shifted yet again to being viewed as a sentimental longing for the past in which the desire to both experience and conserve heritage could be understood as a form of nostalgia (Gentry & Smith, 2019; Lowenthal, 2015). This has also been complemented in recent years by more of a response to the modern condition and the alienation arising from contemporary life embodied in a notion of a more simple past. As Walden (2022, par.2) suggests, ‘A preference for how things used to be may be a symptom of nostalgia, but the underlying condition is not so simple. ... The fact that we cite simplicity as the cardinal value of the past does hint at nostalgia’s true quarry. What we really seek in our nostalgic reveries, I want to suggest, is the inertness of the past.’

Linguistic representation of nostalgia goes back to Hofer (1688/1934), where he referred to ‘heimweh’, which is translated from German-Swiss as ‘homesickness’. In French terms, it is referred to as ‘*maladie du pays*’, meaning ‘disease of the native land’. *Nostos* is the Homeric Greek word for return or homecoming and *algos* for suffering. Walden (2022) uses the example of the return of Odysseus whose homecoming should have been welcoming, but instead, Odysseus discovers that Ithaca means one further labour to perform: ‘That’s the pain of nostalgia: the realization that the significance of the past, like everything else, is not something given to us, but something left for us to create’ (Walden, 2022, par. 10).

The literal meaning of *nostalgia*, then, is the suffering caused by the yearning to return to one’s place of origin. Hofer’s interpretation of nostalgia has been questioned due to his philosophical assumptions holding a strong case for medical nosology, which is applicable in psychiatry, but not entirely in psychology (Batcho, 2013; Illbruck, 2012). There was a shift in interest in nostalgia in psychology, where nostalgia was linked to depression due to being homesick (Batcho, 1995). Homesickness has often been examined in relation to nostalgia because it implies psychological distance and irretrievable loss (Sedikides et al., 2004). However, homesickness sometimes has a negative connotation to it because there is a sense of negative experience of losing a home place (Chen et al., 2021), whereas nostalgia is usually associated with more positive emotions (Biskas et al., 2019; Lems, 2016; Sedikides et al., 2004).

In tourism, nostalgia is significant for both individual and collective memories in relation to notions of diasporic and personal concepts of home as well as individual and shared identities, created memories and inert pasts (Bergs et al., 2020; Chi & Chi, 2020; Cho et al., 2021). As such there is significant overlap between nostalgia and heritage tourism, with tourism having even been regarded as responsible for the production of nostalgia via advertising and branding as well as more directly in the development of particular products and services (Leheny, 2022; Morgan Parmett, 2022; Winichakul, 1995; Wong & Jeong, 2019; Ye, 2021), what Hewison (1987) described as the ‘heritage industry’, especially in the context of post-industrial redevelopment. This introduction to the special issue addresses the relationship between nostalgia and contemporary heritage tourism from several different perspectives, identifying themes and issues taken up in some of the following papers.

## **Nostalgia: common themes and conceptual developments**

The philosophical underpinnings and ontological and epistemological assumptions of nostalgia have been primarily developed from medicine and psychology. As a result, the conceptualization of nostalgia or nostalgia-related phenomena has historically been influenced by work linking memory, identity, and temporality.

### ***Temporality and nostalgia***

Nostalgia is a type of phenomenon that exists in the emotional space between memory and identity (Holak & Havlena, 1998). This space is affected by how time is perceived and, therefore, the

phenomenological dimensions of nostalgia. The past, present and future of nostalgia imply temporal dimensions of the concept (Craik, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2008a). Nostalgia is regarded as being triggered by the past in two distinct ways (Biskas et al., 2019; Holak & Havlena, 1998). First, it is directly influenced by the context influencing the scale and scope of emotional relevance (Bryant et al., 2005; Holak & Havlena, 1992), that are 'an outcome of emotional attachments cemented with experience and memories related to places' (Meier & Aytekin, 2019, p. 107) or objects or social-cultural expressions of the past. For example, Dimitriadou et al. (2019, p. 446) have given the example of country of origin labelling or association which is more than an 'informational cue' and 'has symbolic and emotional relevance to consumers ... , yielding a rich imagery with sensory, affective, and ritual connotation'. Second, pre-nostalgia is viewed as a motivational factor of an individual to act because of immediate awareness of missing something at the exact moment of loss, which occurs before the creation of a recallable memory (Mindich, 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016b). This requires a high level of awareness of self-identity. In order to evaluate what exactly will be missing, an individual needs to realize what is presently at a loss (Routledge et al., 2012). For Mindich (2016), the thing that is missed is specific to individuals at the pre-nostalgic phase and may be triggered by any cultural or social object that is at risk of being lost. Subramanian (2011), in describing India's vanishing vultures, described the feeling as an ache for something that will soon disappear but which is present for now. At a later stage and in light of subsequent environmental or socio-cultural change, such feelings may emerge into a shared or collective nostalgia: 'nostalgia that is experienced in the context of a particular social identity or as a member of a certain group and pertains to events or objects related to this group' (Dimitriadou et al., 2019, p. 446).

An individual's experience, whether pre-nostalgic or after a recallable memory has been created, impacts their actions in the present (Bryant et al., 2005; Routledge et al., 2011). Nostalgia's association with distance is regarded as a triggering reaction to nostalgic emotions according to the significance of the memory (Frow, 1991). This situation impacts how the perceived emotional distance is measured. For example, a positive memory of past business travel has more distance for an individual than the memory of losing a loved one. When an individual experiences a memory, the distance they experience is linked to spatial and temporal factors of nostalgia, which can create emotional distance. This space-time relationship is chronological and 'cannot be separated from events and vice versa' (Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p. 4). Events imply past experiences that create memories and shape human future experiences (Holquist, 2010). Being distant in the present is influenced by pre-nostalgic action that creates specific memories that can help to predict future behaviour (Abeyta et al., 2015).

Existing literature has emphasized the influence of nostalgic memories on future behaviour (Holquist, 2010). Nostalgia has long been associated with having a positive impact on future experience (Cheung et al., 2013, 2017). Perceptions of a positive future are intrinsically embedded in the ability of individuals to give shape and meaning to longing for the past (Boym, 2001). Positive nostalgic behaviour can help consumers select their preferences (Schindler & Holbrook, 2003), creates meaning (Sedikides et al., 2017), and has positive health benefits and psychological effects (Biskas et al., 2019; Kersten et al., 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016a, 2016b). Furthermore, being aware of nostalgic emotions can help to make more educated decisions in the future (Abeyta et al., 2015) and remain goal-focused (Peetz & Wilson, 2008). Nevertheless, Sedikides and Wildschut (2022) suggest that across different cultures, nostalgia serves three main functions: it elevates social connectedness (in terms of a sense of belonging and acceptance), it provides meaning in life (with respect to it being significant, purposeful, and coherent), and provides self-continuity (in terms of a connection between past and present selves).

For enhancing the positive impact of space-time relationship on nostalgic emotions, increased self-awareness of past, present and future is important. This can be achieved by focusing on restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). 'Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time' (Boym, 2001, p. 95). These categorizations provide a guiding point for defining the meaning of 'longing' and an objective

view of the relationship between past actions, present feelings and future predictions (Boym, 2001; Craik, 2002).

### ***Migration and nostalgia***

Nostalgia has also been examined in relation to labour movement and migrant identity (Barcus & Shugatai, 2022; Sonn et al., 2017). Historically, the motivations for migration have been associated with leaving and losing homes and making a new destination a home (Chen et al., 2021). Immigrants may have an idealized perception of past experience, which has a negative impact on their experience in the home environment (Duncan et al., 2012). The concept of nostalgia has been applied to the migration process by examining the implications of displacement and the personal and political challenges of homemaking (Sonn et al., 2017). The challenges of displacement during migration affect identity construction and negotiating to belong in the new country (Milligan, 2003; Sonn et al., 2017). Nostalgia usually occurs after displacement and associated identity discontinuity as individuals develop a sense of regaining self and collective identities (Davis, 1979; Milligan, 2003).

Nostalgia can also increase self-esteem and personal morality, which impacts self-identity (Routledge et al., 2008; Wildschut et al., 2006). The notion of collective identities is developed from the psychological feeling of building strong social ties with people with the same values and experiences and can help individuals increase their self-worth and enhance self-continuity (Barcus & Shugatai, 2022; Van Tilburg et al., 2018; Van Tilburg et al., 2019). Nostalgia can therefore help the settlement process among migrants by developing emotional connectedness to the new place and culture (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Sonn et al., 2017) and can be used as a strategy to shape spaces for belonging in a new place (Bhatia, 2007; Georgiou, 2013; Naficy, 2013).

### ***Effects of nostalgia***

The experience of social connectedness can help create a sense of belonging in a new place (Kim, 2005; Wildschut et al., 2006) by strengthening social bonds and reducing the sense of loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2008). Developing relationships with like-minded people at a new location or country helps the integration process into the new culture. However, aspects of the past may be lost in the new sense of self-identity, which may affect self-awareness, self-worth and self-esteem, which shape the nostalgic experience (Juhl et al., 2020). In some cases, nostalgia may even have a negative impact by turning a pleasant experience in the past into negative emotions in the present (Verplanken, 2012).

Nevertheless, 'nostalgia can have a buffering effect of existential threats (Harper, 1966; Juhl et al., 2010) and is regarded as having the capacity to increase meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2012; Sedikides et al., 2017; Van Tilburg et al., 2018). When the value of 'meaning' is challenged, individuals may turn to past experiences to counter these threats (Routledge et al., 2011) and help engender feelings of security (Hepper et al., 2012). Hence, nostalgia may have a regulative effect on migrant well-being and ability to adjust to a new home environment (Biskas et al., 2019; Sedikides et al., 2015) while, over time, it may also become a significant driver for promoting return travel to the old home country (Georgiou, 2013; Naficy, 2013) or to retain connectivity to previously significant places in someone's life, i.e. where one went to school, where one grew up, or had a romantic relationship (Chen et al., 2021; Hall, 2005). Potentially reflecting what Graburn (1995, p. 166) described as travelling 'with a wish for the past.'

### ***Nostalgia and tourism***

Nostalgia has long been recognized as an important factor in the consumption and production of tourism (Hewison, 1987). However, the relationship between nostalgia and tourism is complex,

with its explanatory power of nostalgia as a tourist motivation predominantly focusing on tourism at cultural heritage sites (Dann, 1995; Park et al., 2018). Hence, heritage tourism is the most common theoretical lens through which the relationships between nostalgia and tourism and related notions, such as nostalgia tourism, are explored (Caton & Santos, 2007; Kim, 2005; Newland & Taylor, 2010). For example, nostalgia has been associated with historical events in heritage tourism by examining relationships between socio-cultural conditions and heritage tourism institutions (Kim, 2005). The events or experiences of the past can shape travellers' perceptions and experiences of a destination (Bandyopadhyay, 2008). However, a destination environment is subject to change over time, hence nostalgia can have a significant influence on the gap between the perception of a destination and contemporary realities (Hall & Page, 2014), which can also affect satisfaction levels (Sæþórsdóttir & Hall, 2020).

Nostalgia is also linked to cultural tourism because of the historical dimensions of culture (Russell, 2008). The nostalgic tourist segment is regarded as being driven by a desire to fulfil self-identity, which is crucial for the positive effects of nostalgia on individual experience (Batcho, 2013; Juhl et al., 2020). It has been argued that there are two types of nostalgic tourists: real and historical. A real nostalgic tourist seeks to revisit their past cultural setting and relive personal past experiences, as here, nostalgia represents 'a sentimental or bittersweet yearning for an experience, product, or service from the past' (Baker & Kennedy, 1994, p. 169). In contrast, an historical nostalgic tourist seeks to visit a cultural environment that has been indirectly conveyed to them through marketing and advertising (e.g. movies, books, stories), which creates an idealized perception of a destination (Smith & Campbell, 2017; Stern, 1992). However, a third intermediate category can also be offered in which individuals seek to revisit a setting that has been passed down via stories within the family or other significant individuals and is, therefore, an intergenerational cultural setting; what is sometimes termed 'roots tourism' or genealogical tourism (Higginbotham, 2012; Mensah, 2015; Pelliccia, 2018). Nevertheless, the nostalgic experience of all these categories of tourists can differ based on their pre-determined expectations. For example, a real nostalgic tourist can experience pre-nostalgia and hence be more aware of missing something at the moment of loss (Mindich, 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016b). This creates a positive nostalgic experience because recallable memory is not created. A historical nostalgic tourist's experience can be both positive and negative depending on the expectations that they created based on indirect means of communication and whether these have been acceded or not (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Kim et al., 2019). Yet, regardless of the reason for the sense of nostalgia, it creates meaning for tourists.

Nostalgia plays an important part in forming a destination image and experiential value before an individual experiences a destination. The relationship between destination image and experiential value influences future visit intention (Leong et al., 2015). This creates the value of meaning for a destination and can impact tourist nostalgic experience (Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). Ideally, this experience should fulfil a tourist's desire for authentic cultural and heritage tourism experiences (Russell, 2008). The common assumption that underpins the existence of nostalgia is some degree of dissatisfaction with the present, which is believed to encourage tourists to engage with the past because it is associated with positive memories (Hewison, 1987). However, in tourism studies, it is often assumed that positive present experiences can also initiate positive nostalgic experiences as a result of the desire for authentic tourism experiences (Russell, 2008). Whether the experience is negative or positive, it is impacted by the perceptions that tourists have of the destination, tourism products or services which are being consumed (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Li et al., 2019) and which can significantly impact future experience (Smith & Campbell, 2017).

The relationship between tourism and migration has been explored in relation to strategic nostalgia. Producing nostalgia goods for migrants has been viewed as a tactic to develop customized experiences for heritage tourists (Newland & Taylor, 2010). Furthermore, nostalgia has been used to develop tourists' sense of attachment to hotel brands (Li et al., 2019). Attachment influences the choice of a service provider because travellers can trust in a provider due to familiarity (Li et al., 2020). Although nostalgia can be viewed as a strategic motivating factor, it is still an emotion that is triggered by past

experiences. Interestingly, when nostalgia is examined in relation to migration, it is linked to relationships with the community in a new place (Sonn et al., 2017), however this is somewhat different when talking about tourism because to develop these relations, one may have to be a long-term traveller in order to develop nostalgia (Newland & Taylor, 2010). Hence, different types of tourists will have different nostalgic experiences, depending on their past experiences.

The academic inquiry into nostalgia-related tourism has been examined through such topics as the experience of a tourist; the perception of a tourist; the effect of nostalgia in branding, advertising, and marketing of tourism sites; personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Dann, 1995; Kim, 2005; Kim et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019; Vesey & Dimanche, 2003). However, an integrative understanding of nostalgia and its relationships with different aspects of tourism is still lacking. In this special issue, the studies provide theoretical and empirical insights into the relationships between nostalgia and tourism.

Peirson (2023) engages with the importance of place in understanding nostalgia when she examines the collective nostalgia associated with the sense of place of the Kent seaside resort of Folkstone. As she notes, the nostalgic image of the English seaside resort continues to influence the town's future. Interestingly, it stands in contrast with other nearby coastal towns, such as Margate, that have sought to reinvigorate their tourism products by adopting new art and cultural products while still retaining some elements of the traditional seaside experience. Adie and de Bernardi (2023) also engage strongly with place, but in this case, the sense of place being lost or substantially altered because of disaster. In their study of second homeowners in Ocean Beach, New York, they note the grey area between personal and collective memories, what they describe as meso-nostalgia. Interestingly with respect to place attachment in the second home landscape, they observe a marked difference between respondents with inherited second homes and those who had purchased them, indicating, as noted above, the significance of home stories being passed through generations.

In their study of Su Nuraxi, a World Heritage site in Sardinia, Italy, Prayag and Del Chiappa (2023) found that for both domestic and international visitors nostalgia can be triggered by both positive (astonishment and gratitude) and negative (guilt and disappointment) emotions while perceived authenticity was not found to be a strong predictor. Interestingly, they found no statistically significant difference between domestic and international visitors in terms of their felt nostalgia upon visiting. Novoa (2023) also engages in issues of nostalgia and the representation of collective memory in relation to heritage tourism in the former mining town of Lota, Chile. In this setting, nostalgia is seen as a means of challenging official heritage discourse, and she raises the importance of gendered nostalgia and the under-considered role of female narratives in studies of nostalgia in tourism. Finally, Duda (2023) examines Pripyat in Ukraine, an abandoned city close to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, which has now started to function as a tourist site. She notes that photography actively processes the making of heritage and via tourist photography, the heritage is 'reframed' and domesticated. In her study, the tourist gaze on Pripyat was analysed through four categories: must-see places, tourist performativity behaviours, the acts and ruin photos, which all serve to reinforce the direct relationship between the tourist imagination, photography, and heritage.

The papers in this special issue, therefore, shed new perspectives on the relationship between heritage, tourism and nostalgia and highlight the intersections between individual and collective memories. Although nostalgia is not uniquely a feature of the modern, its use in tourism and product marketing and branding highlights its commoditisation and the creation of imagined nostalgias. Nevertheless, as this review and special issue highlights, nostalgia will also continue to have a strong personal and positive function as both a travel motive and as a way of understanding and negotiating personal and collective identities in a rapidly changing world.

## Conclusion

This special issue highlights the importance of collective and individual nostalgia in relation to heritage tourism as well as wider concerns over the relationship between tourism and sense of place.

Research shows that nostalgia is the product of understandings of the past, present and future (Craik, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2008a), however, many heritage studies remain single-shot assessments, and there is a clear need for longitudinal studies that can help to capture the temporal effect of nostalgia and change over time including with respect to both place and its consumption (Sæþórsdóttir & Hall, 2020). In addition, there is a need to examine meso-nostalgia in more detail. Much of the existing research focuses on the experience of an individual or migrating group of tourists (collective); however, as Adie and de Bernardi (2023) argue that the grey line in between needs further examination because individual experiences and collective experiences can be influenced by each other.

Finally, nostalgia needs to be positioned within a wider cultural context. Understandings of the past, both personal and collective, do not occur outside of the specific cultural context(s) they have developed in. Turner (1987) suggested that some cultures may be more prone to feelings of nostalgia than others, while Sedikides and Wildschut (2022) find significant similarities between cultures although they note, 'Future research on nostalgia would benefit by taking into account specific dimensions of individualism/collectivism' (p. 11). Yet the emotion has only received limited attention in cross-cultural studies while it clearly remains a potentially important driver for international tourism, especially in migrant communities and in those travellers seeking personal and collective histories and memories. Therefore, while the collection of papers in this special issue offers some preliminary directions in future research on the relationship between tourism and nostalgia, there is clearly much ground that could be covered by future researchers.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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